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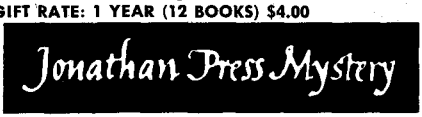

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

SUSPENSE STORY

ALL AT ONCE, NO ALICE — *Cornell Woolrich* 110

CRIME STORIES

FOOL'S MATE — *Stanley Ellin* 3

THE POINT OF HONOR — *W. Somerset Maugham* 30

DETECTIVE STORIES

Spotted Shield in
WOMAN HUNT NO GOOD — *Oliver La Farge* 17

Annie in
IT WOULDN'T BE FAIR — *Jack Finney* 42

Mr. Bickmore in
BICKMORE DEALS WITH THE DUCHESS — *J. S. Fletcher* 65

Don Burney in
THEY GOT THE WRONG GUY — *Raoul Whitfield* 81

EQMM "FIRST"

CORPUS DELICTI — *Harry Miner* 54

RIDDLE STORY

THE WILL OF JUSTICE — *Mark Rondy* 77

ROGUES' GALLERY

A DEAL IN OSTRICHES — *H. G. Wells* 106

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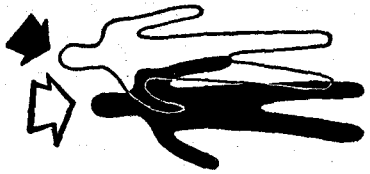

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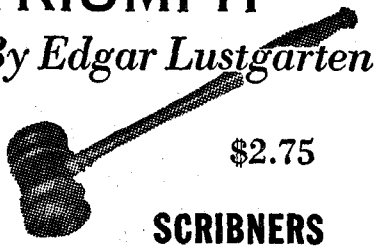

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WINNER OF A SECOND PRIZE: STANLEY ELLIN

A new prize-winning story by the author of "The Specialty of the House," "The Cat's-Paw," "Death on Christmas Eve," and "The Orderly World of Mr. Appleby" is nothing short of an Event, with a capital E . . .

Some time ago, Stanley Ellin met a devotee of Dupin, Holmes, and EQMM, and this devotee turned out to be one of the world's chess masters and possibly the greatest living authority on the game's history and literature. In a name, Mr. Irving Chernev, editor of FIRESIDE BOOK OF CHESS *(1949) . . .*

Mr. Chernev's home, we understand, groans with collected works on all phases and aspects of chess, from antiquity to modernity, and he mixes his deep erudition with wit and humor. Now, Mr. Ellin claims that he, Stanley Ellin, is but an indifferent player at the sport of Kings (and Queens), and that his only distinction in the game is the fact that he is one of the few players in all the world whom Mr. Chernev has never beaten — a distinction, Mr. Ellin hastens to explain, achieved only by his grimly refusing to play with Mr. Chernev. But while he obdurately avoided any test of prowess, Mr. Ellin was more than willing to talk about the game, and soon he found himself fascinated by chess lore — obscure points of history, psychological factors in playing, and anecdotes about famous competitors. It was inevitable, Mr. Ellin being what he is (a writer), and chess being what it is (one of the facts of life), that Mr. Ellin's exposure should lead to a head-on collision; and that this collision should assume, in its ultimate shape, the classical proportions of, on the one hand, an immovable (dead) body, and on the other, an irresistible (police) force.

FOOL'S MATE

by STANLEY ELLIN

WHEN GEORGE HUNEKER came home from the office that evening he was obviously fired by a strange excitement. His ordinarily sallow cheeks were flushed, his eyes shone behind his rimless spectacles, and instead of carefully removing his rubbers and neatly placing them on the strip of mat laid for that purpose in a corner of the hallway, he pulled

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them off with reckless haste and tossed them aside. Then, still wearing his hat and overcoat, he undid the wrappings of the package he had brought with him and displayed a small, flat, leather case. When he opened the case Louise saw a bed of shabby green velvet in which rested the austere black and white forms of a set of chessmen.

"Aren't they beautiful?" George said. He ran a finger lovingly over one of the pieces. "Look at the work on this: nothing fancy to stick away in a glass case, you understand, but everything neat and clean and ready for action the way it ought to be. All genuine ivory and ebony, and all hand-made, every one of them."

Louise's eyes narrowed. "And just how much did you pay out for this stuff?"

"I didn't," George said. "That is, I didn't buy it. Mr. Oelrichs gave it to me."

"Oelrichs?" said Louise. "You mean that old crank you brought home to dinner that time? The one who just sat and watched us like the cat that ate the canary, and wouldn't say a word unless you poked it out of him?"

"Oh, Louise!"

"Don't you 'Oh, Louise' me! I thought I made my feelings about him mighty clear to you long before this. And, may I ask, why should our fine Mr. Oelrichs suddenly decide to give you this thing?"

"Well," George said uneasily, "you know he's been pretty sick, and what with him needing only a few months more for retirement I was carrying most of his work for him. Today was his last day, and he gave me this as a kind of thank-you present. Said it was his favorite set, too, but he wanted to give me the best thing he could, and this was it."

"How generous of Mr. Oelrichs," Louise remarked frigidly. "Did it ever occur to him that if he wanted to pay you back for your time and trouble, something practical would be a lot more to the point?"

"Why, I was just doing him a favor, Louise. Even if he did offer me money or anything like that, I wouldn't take it."

"The more fool you," Louise sniffed. "All right, take off your things, put them away right, and get ready for supper. It's just about ready."

She moved toward the kitchen, and George trailed after her placatingly. "You know, Louise, Mr. Oelrichs said something that was very interesting."

"I'm sure he did."

"Well, he said there were some people in the world who *needed* chess — that when they learned to play it real well they'd see for themselves how much they needed it. And what I thought was that there's no reason why you and I . . ."

She stopped short and faced him with her hands on her hips. "You mean that after I'm done taking care of the house, and shopping, and cooking your hot meals, and mending

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and darning, then I'm supposed to sit down and learn how to play games with you! For a man going on fifty, George Huneker, you get some peculiar ideas."

Pulling off his overcoat in the hallway, he reflected that there was small chance of his losing track of his age, at least not as long as Louise doted so much on reminding him. He had first heard about it a few months after his marriage when he was going on thirty and had been offered a chance to go into business for himself. He had heard about it every year since, on some occasion or other, although as he learned more and more about Louise he had fallen into fewer traps.

The only trouble was that Louise always managed to stay one jump ahead of him, and while in time he came to understand that she would naturally put her foot down at such things as his leaving a good steady job, or at their having a baby when times were hard (and in Louise's opinion they always were), or at buying the house outright when they could rent it so cheap, it still came as a surprise that she so bitterly opposed the idea of having company to the house, or of reading some book he had just enjoyed, or of tuning in the radio to a symphony, or, as in this case, of taking up chess.

Company, she made it clear, was a bother and expense, small print hurt her eyes, symphonies gave her a splitting headache, and chess, it seemed, was something for which she could not possibly find time. Before they had been married, George thought unhappily, it had all been different somehow. They were always in the midst of a crowd of his friends, and when books or music or anything like that were the topics of discussion, she followed the talk with bright and vivacious interest. Now she just wanted to sit with her knitting every night while she listened to comedians bellowing over the radio.

Not being well, of course, could be one reason for all this. She suffered from a host of aches and pains which she dwelt on in such vivid detail at times that George himself could feel sympathetic twinges go through him. Their medicine chest bulged with remedies, their diet had dwindled to a bland and tasteless series of concoctions, and it was a rare month which did not find Louise running up a sizeable doctor's bill for the treatment of what George vaguely came to think of as "women's troubles."

Still, George would have been the first to point out that despite the handicaps she worked under, Louise had been as good a wife as a man could ask for. His salary over the years had hardly been luxurious, but penny by penny she had managed to put aside fifteen thousand dollars in their bank account. This was a fact known only to the two of them since Louise made it a point to dwell on their relative poverty in her conversations with anyone, and while George always felt some embarrassment when she did this, Louise pointed out that one of

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the best ways to save your money was not to let the world at large know you had any, and since a penny saved was a penny earned she was contributing as much to their income in her way as George was in his. This, while not reducing George's embarrassment, did succeed in glossing it with increased respect for Louise's wisdom and capability.

And when added to this was the knowledge that his home was always neat as a pin, his clothing carefully mended, and his health fanatically ministered to, it was easy to see why George chose to count his blessings rather than make an issue of anything so trivial as his wife's becoming his partner at chess. Which, as George himself might have admitted had you pinned him down to it, was a bit of a sacrifice, for in no time at all after receiving the set of chessmen he found himself a passionate devotee of the game. And chess, as he sometimes reflected while poring over his board of an evening with the radio booming in his ears and his wife's knitting needles flickering away contentedly, would seem to be a game greatly enhanced by the presence of an opponent. He did not reflect this ironically; there was no irony in George's nature.

Mr. Oelrichs, in giving him the set, had said he would be available for instruction at any time. But since Louise had already indicated that that gentleman would hardly be a welcome guest in her home, and since she had often expressed decided opinions on any man who would leave his hearth and home to go traipsing about for no reason, George did not even think the matter worth broaching. Instead, he turned to a little text aptly entitled *An Invitation to Chess*, was led by the invitation to essay other and more difficult texts, and was thence led to a whole world of literature on chess, staggering in its magnitude and complexity.

He ate chess, drank chess, and slept chess. He studied the masters and past masters until he could quote chapter and verse from even their minor triumphs. He learned the openings, the middle game, and the end game. He learned to eschew the reckless foray which led nowhere in favor of the positional game where cunning strategy turned a side into a relentless force that inevitably broke and crushed the enemy before it. Strange names danced across his horizon: Alekhine, Capablanca, Lasker, Nimzovich, and he pursued them, drunk with the joy of discovery, through the ebony and ivory mazes of their universe.

But in all this there was still that one thing lacking: an opponent, a flesh-and-blood opponent against whom he could test himself. It was one thing, he sometimes thought disconsolately, to have a book at one's elbow while pondering a move; it would be quite another to ponder even the identical move with a man waiting across the board to turn it to his own advantage and destroy you with it. It became a growing hunger,

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that desire to make a move and see a hand reach across the table to answer it; it became a curious obsession so that at times, when Louise's shadow moved abruptly against the wall or a log settled in the fireplace, George would look up suddenly, half expecting to see the man seated in the empty chair opposite him.

He came to visualize the man quite clearly after a while. A quiet contemplative man much like himself, in fact, with graying hair and rimless spectacles that tended to slide a bit when he bent over the board. A man who played just a shade better than himself; not so well that he could not be beaten, but well enough to force George to his utmost to gain an occasional victory.

And there was one thing more he expected of this man; something a trifle unorthodox, perhaps, if one was a stickler for chess ritual. The man must prefer to play the white side all the time. It was the white side that moved first, that took the offensive until, perhaps, the tide could be turned against it. George himself infinitely preferred the black side, preferred to parry the thrusts and advances of white while he slowly built up a solid wall of defense against its climactic moves. *That* was the way to learn the game, George told himself; after a player learned how to make himself invulnerable on the defense, there was nothing he couldn't do on attack.

However, to practise one's defense still required a hand to set the offense into motion, and eventually George struck on a solution which, he felt with mild pride, was rather ingenious. He would set up the board, seat himself behind the black side, and then make the opening move for white. This he would counter with a black piece, after which he would move again for white, and so on until some decision was reached.

It was not long before the flaws in this system became distressingly obvious. Since he naturally favored the black side, and since he knew both plans of battle from their inception, black won game after game with ridiculous ease. And after the twentieth fiasco of this sort George sank back into his chair despairingly. If he could only put one side out of his mind completely while he was moving for the other, why, there would be no problem at all! Which, he realized cheerlessly, was a prospect about as logical as an ancient notion he had come across in his reading somewhere, the notion that if you cut a serpent in half, the separated halves would then turn on each other and fight themselves savagely to death.

He set up the board again after this glum reflection, and then walked around the table and seated himself in white's chair. Now, if he were playing the white side what would he do? A game depends not only on one's skill, he told himself, but also on one's knowledge of his opponent. And not only on the opponent's style of play, but also on his character, his personality, his whole nature. George solemnly

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looked across the table at black's now empty chair and brooded on this. Then slowly, deliberately, he made his opening move.

After that, he quickly walked around the table and sat down on black's side. The going, he found, was much easier here, and almost mechanically he answered white's move. With a thrill of excitement chasing inside him, he left his seat and moved around to the other side of the board again, already straining hard to put black and its affairs far out of his mind.

"For pity's sake, George, what *are* you doing!"

George started, and looked around dazedly. Louise was watching him, her lips compressed, her knitting dropped on her lap, and her manner charged with such disapproval that the whole room seemed to frown at him. He opened his mouth to explain, and hastily thought better of it.

"Why, nothing," he said, "nothing at all."

"Nothing at all!" Louise declared tartly. "The way you're tramping around, somebody would think you can't find a comfortable chair in the house. You know I . . ."

Then her voice trailed off, her eyes became glassy, her body straightened and became rigid with devouring attention. The comedian on the radio had answered an insult with another evidently so devastating that the audience in the studio could do no more than roar in helpless laughter. Even Louise's lips turned up ever so slightly at the corners as she reached for her knitting again, and George gratefully seized this opportunity to drop into the chair behind black's side.

He had been on the verge of a great discovery, he knew that; but what exactly had it been? Was it that changing places physically had allowed him to project himself into the forms of two players, each separate and distinct from the other? If so, he was at the end of the line, George knew, because he would never be able to explain all that getting up and moving around to Louise.

But suppose the board itself were turned around after each move? Or, and George found himself charged with a growing excitement, since chess was completely a business of the mind anyhow — since, when one had mastered the game sufficiently it wasn't even necessary to use a board at all — wasn't the secret simply a matter of *turning oneself into the other player* when his move came?

It was white's move now, and George bent to his task. He was playing white's side, he must do what white would do — more than that, he must feel white's very emotions — but the harder he struggled and strained in his concentration, the more elusive became his goal. Again and again, at the instant he was about to reach his hand out, the thought of what black intended to do, of what black was surely *going* to do, slipped through his mind like a dot of quicksilver and made him writhe inwardly with a maddening sense of defeat.

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This now became the obsession, and evening after evening he exercised himself at it. He lost weight, his face drew into haggard lines so that Louise was always at his heels during mealtimes trying to make him take an interest in her wholly uninteresting recipes. His interest in his job dwindled until it was barely perfunctory, and his superior, who at first had evinced no more than a mild surprise and irritation, started to shake his head ominously.

But with every game, every move, every effort he made, George felt with exultation he was coming nearer that goal. There would come a moment, he told himself with furious certainty, when he could view the side across the board with objectivity, with disinterest, with no more knowledge of its intentions and plans than he would have of any flesh-and-blood player who sat there; and when that day came, he would have achieved a triumph no other player before him could ever claim!

He was so sure of himself, so confident that the triumph lay beyond the next move each time he made a move, that when it came at last his immediate feeling was no more than a comfortable gratification, and an expansive easing of all his nerves. Something like the feeling, he thought pleasurably, that a man gets after a hard day's work when he sinks into bed at night. Exactly that sort of feeling, in fact.

He had left the black position on the board perilously exposed through a bit of carelessness, and then in an effort to recover himself had moved the king's bishop in a neat defensive gesture that could cost white dear. When he looked up to study white's possible answer he saw White sitting there in the chair across the table, his fingertips gently touching each other, an ironic smile on his lips.

"Good," said White pleasantly. "Surprisingly good for you, George."

At this, George's sense of gratification vanished like a soap bubble flicked by a casual finger. It was not only the amiable insult conveyed by the words which nettled him; equally disturbing was the fact that White was utterly unlike the man that George had been prepared for. He had not expected White to resemble him as one twin resembles another, yet feature for feature the resemblance was so marked that White could have been the image that stared back at him from his shaving mirror each morning. An image, however, which, unlike George's, seemed invested with a power and arrogance that were quite overwhelming. Here, George felt with a touch of resentment, was no man to hunch over a desk computing dreary rows of figures, but one who with dash and brilliance made great decisions at the head of a long committee table. A man who thought a little of tomorrow, but much more of today and the good things it offered. And one who would always find the price for those good things.

That much was evident in the

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matchless cut of White's clothing, in the grace and strength of the lean, well-manicured hands, in the merciless yet merry glint in the eyes that looked back into George's. It was when he looked into those eyes that George found himself fumbling for some thought that seemed to lie just beyond him. The image of himself was reflected so clearly in those eyes; perhaps it was not an image. Perhaps . . .

He was jarred from his train of thought by White's moving a piece. "Your move," said White carelessly, "that is, if you want to continue the game."

George looked at the board and found his position still secure. "Why shouldn't I want to continue the game? Our positions . . ."

"For the moment are equal," White interposed promptly. "What you fail to consider is the long view: I am playing to win; you are playing only to keep from losing."

"It seems very much the same thing," argued George.

"But it is not," said White, "and the proof of that lies in the fact that I shall win this game, and every other game we ever play."

The effrontery of this staggered George. "Maroczy was a master who relied a good deal on defensive strategy," he protested, "and if you are familiar with his games . . ."

"I am exactly as well acquainted with Maroczy's games as you are," White observed, "and I do not hesitate to say that had we ever played, I should have beaten him every game as well."

George reddened. "You think very well of yourself, don't you," he said, and was surprised to see that instead of taking offense White was regarding him with a look of infinite pity.

"No," White said at last, "it is you who thinks well of me," and then as if he had just managed to see and avoid a neatly baited trap, he shook his head and drew his lips into a faintly sardonic grimace. "Your move," he said.

With an effort George put aside the vaguely troubling thoughts that clustered in his mind, and made the move. He made only a few after that when he saw clearly that he was hopelessly and ignominiously beaten. He was beaten a second game, and then another after that, and then in the fourth game made a despairing effort to change his tactics. On his eleventh move he saw a devastating opportunity to go on the offensive, hesitated, refused it, and was lost again. At that George grimly set about placing the pieces back in their case.

"You'll be back tomorrow?" he said, thoroughly put out at White's obvious amusement.

"If nothing prevents me."

George suddenly felt cold with fear. "What could prevent you?" he managed to say.

White picked up the white queen and revolved it slowly between his fingers. "Louise, perhaps. What if she decided not to let you indulge yourself in this fashion?"

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"But why? Why should she? She's never minded up to now!"

"Louise, my good man, is an extremely stupid and petulant woman . . ."

"Now, that's uncalled for!" George said, stung to the quick.

"And," White continued as if he had not been interrupted at all, "she is the master here. Such people now and then like to affirm their mastery seemingly for no reason at all. Actually, such gestures are a sop to their vanity — as necessary to them as the air they breathe."

George mustered up all the courage and indignation at his command. "If those are your honest opinions," he said bravely, "I don't think you have the right to come to this house ever again."

On the heels of his words Louise stirred in her armchair and turned toward him. "George," she said briskly, "that's quite enough of that game for the evening. Don't you have anything better to do with your time?"

"I'm putting everything away now," George answered hastily, but when he reached for the chessman still gripped between his opponent's fingers, he saw White studying Louise with a look that made him quail. White turned to him then, and his eyes were like pieces of dark glass through which one can see the almost unbearable light of a searing flame.

"Yes," White said slowly. "For what she is and what she has done to you I hate her with a consuming hate. Knowing that, do you wish me to return?"

The eyes were not unkind when they looked at him now, George saw, and the feel of the chessman which White thrust into his hand was warm and reassuring. He hesitated, cleared his throat, then, "I'll see you tomorrow," he said at last.

White's lips drew into that familiar sardonic grimace. "Tomorrow, the next day, any time you want me," he said. "But it will always be the same. You will never beat me."

Time proved that White had not underestimated himself. And time itself, as George learned, was something far better measured by an infinite series of chess games, by the moves within a chess game, than by any such device as a calendar or clock. The discovery was a delightful one; even more delightful was the realization that the world around him, when viewed clearly, had come to resemble nothing so much as an object seen through the wrong end of a binocular. All those people who pushed and prodded and poked and demanded countless explanations and apologies could be seen as sharp and clear as ever but nicely reduced in perspective, so that it was obvious that no matter how close they came, they could never really touch one.

There was a single exception to this: Louise. Every evening the world would close in around the chessboard and the figure of White lounging in the chair on the other side of it. But

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in a corner of the room sat Louise over her knitting, and the air around her was charged with a mounting resentment which would now and then eddy around George in the form of querulous complaints and demands from which there was no escape.

"How *can* you spend every minute at that idiotic game!" she demanded. "Don't you have anything to talk to me about?" And, in fact, he did not, any more than he had since the very first years of his marriage when he had been taught that he had neither voice nor vote in running his home, that she did not care to hear about the people he worked with in his office, and that he could best keep to himself any reflections he had on some subject which was, by her own word, Highbrow.

"And how right she is," White had once taken pains to explain derisively. "If *you* had furnished your home it would be uncluttered and graceful, and Louise would feel awkward and out of place in it. If she comes to know the people you work with too well, she might have to befriend them, entertain them, set her blatant ignorance before them for judgment. No, far better under the circumstances that she dwells in her vacuum, away from unhappy judgments."

As it always could, White's manner drove George to furious resentment. "For a set of opinions pulled out of a cocked hat that sounds very plausible," he burst out. "Tell me, how do you happen to know so much about Louise?"

White looked at him through veiled eyes. "I know only what you know," he said. "No more and no less."

Such passages left George sore and wounded, but for the sake of the game he endured them. When Louise was silent all the world retreated into unreality. Then the reality was the chessboard with White's hand hovering over it, mounting the attack, sweeping everything before it with a reckless brilliance that could only leave George admiring and dismayed.

In fact, if White had any weakness, George reflected mournfully, it was certainly not in his game, but rather in his deft and unpleasant way of turning each game into the occasion for a little discourse on the science of chess, a discourse which always wound up with some remarkably perverse and impudent reflections on George's personal affairs.

"You know that the way a man plays chess demonstrates that man's whole nature," White once remarked. "Knowing this, does it not strike you as significant that you always choose to play the defensive — and always lose?"

That sort of thing was bad enough, but White was at his most savage those times when Louise would intrude in a game: make some demand on George, or openly insist that he put away the board. Then White's jaw would set, and his eyes would flare with that terrible hate that always seemed to be smouldering in them when he regarded the woman.

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Once when Louise had gone so far as to actually pick up a piece from the board and bang it back into the case, White came to his feet so swiftly and menacingly that George leaped up to forestall some rash action. Louise glared at him for that.

"You don't have to jump like that," she snapped; "I didn't break anything. But I can tell you, George Huneker: if you don't stop this nonsense I'll do it for you. I'll break every one of these things to bits if that's what it takes to make you act like a human being again!"

"Answer her!" said White. "Go ahead, why don't you answer her!" And caught between these two fires George could do no more than stand there and shake his head helplessly.

It was this episode, however, which marked a new turn in White's manner: the entrance of a sinister purposefulness thinly concealed in each word and phrase.

"If she knew how to play the game," he said, "she might respect it, and you would have nothing to fear."

"It so happens," George replied defensively, "that Louise is too busy for chess."

White turned in his chair to look at her, and then turned back with a grim smile. "She is knitting. And, it seems to me, she is always knitting. Would you call that being busy?"

"Wouldn't you?"

"No," said White, "I wouldn't. Penelope spent her years at the loom to keep off importunate suitors until her husband returned. Louise spends her years at knitting to keep off life until death comes. She takes no joy in what she does; one can see that with half an eye. But each stitch dropping off the end of those needles brings her one instant nearer death, and, although she does not know it, she rejoices in it."

"And you make all that out of the mere fact that she won't play at chess?" cried George incredulously.

"Not alone chess," said White. "Life."

"And what do you mean by that word *life*, the way you use it?"

"Many things," said White. "The hunger to learn, the desire to create, the ability to feel vast emotions. Oh, many things."

"Many things, indeed," George scoffed. "Big words, that's all they are." But White only drew his lips into that sardonic grimace and said, "Very big. Far too big for Louise, I'm afraid," and then by moving a piece forced George to redirect his attention to the board.

It was as if White had discovered George's weak spot, and took a sadistic pleasure in returning to probe it again and again. And he played his conversational gambits as he made his moves at chess: cruelly, unerringly, always moving forward to the inescapable conclusion with a sort of flashing audacity. There were times when George, writhing helplessly, thought of asking him to drop the subject of Louise once and for all, but

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he could never bring himself to do so. Something in the recesses of George's mind warned him that these conversational fancies were as much a part of White as his capacity for chess, and that if George wanted him at all it would have to be on his own terms.

And George did want him, wanted him desperately, the more so on such an evening as that dreadful one when he came home to tell Louise that he would not be returning to his office for a while. He had not been discharged, of course, but there had been something about his taking a rest until he felt in shape again. Although, he hastily added in alarm as he saw Louise's face go slack and pale, he never felt better in his life.

In the scene that followed, with Louise standing before him and passionately telling him things about himself that left him sick and shaken, he found White's words pouring through his mind in a bitter torrent. It was only when Louise was sitting exhausted in her armchair, her eyes fixed blankly on the wall before her, her knitting in her lap to console her, and he was at his table setting up the pieces, that he could feel the brackish tide of his pain receding.

"And yet there is a solution for all this," White said softly, and turned his eyes toward Louise. "A remarkably simple solution when one comes to think of it."

George felt a chill run through him. "I don't care to hear about it," he said hoarsely.

"Have you ever noticed, George," White persisted, "that that piddling, hackneyed picture on the wall, set in that Baroque monstrosity of a frame that Louise admires so much, is exactly like a pathetic little fife trying to make itself heard over an orchestra that is playing its loudest?"

George indicated the chessboard. "You have the first move," he said.

"Oh, the game," White said. "The game can wait, George. For the moment I'd much prefer to think what this room — this whole fine house, in fact — could be if it were all yours, George. Yours alone."

"I'd rather get on with the game," George pleaded.

"There's another thing, George," White said slowly, and when he leaned forward George saw his own image again staring at him strangely from those eyes, "another fine thing to think of. If you were all alone in this room, in this house, why, there wouldn't be anyone to tell you when to stop playing chess. You could play morning, noon, and night, and all around to the next morning if you cared to!

"And that's not all, George. You can throw that picture out of the window and hang something respectable on the wall: a few good prints, perhaps — nothing extravagant, mind you — but a few good ones that stir you a bit the first time you come into the room each day and see them.

"And recordings! I understand they're doing marvelous things with recordings today, George. Think of a whole room filled with them: opera,

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symphony, concerto, quartet — just take your pick and play them to your heart's content!"

The sight of his image in those eyes always coming nearer, the jubilant flow of words, the terrible meaning of those words set George's head reeling. He clapped his hands over his ears and shook his head frantically.

"You're mad!" he cried. "Stop it!" And then he discovered to his horror that even with his hands covering his ears he could hear White's voice as clearly and distinctly as ever.

"Is it the loneliness you're afraid of, George? But that's foolish. There are so many people who would be glad to be your friends, to talk to you, and, what's better, to listen to you. There are some who would even love you, if you chose."

"Loneliness?" George said unbelievingly. "Do you think it's loneliness I'm afraid of?"

"Then what is it?"

"You know as well as I," George said in a shaking voice, "what you're trying to lead me to. How could you expect me, expect any decent man, to be that cruel!"

White bared his teeth disdainfully. "Can you tell me anything more cruel than a weak and stupid woman whose only ambition in life was to marry a man infinitely superior to her and then cut him down to her level so that her weakness and stupidity could always be concealed?"

"You've got no right to talk about Louise like that!"

"I have every right," said White grimly, and somehow George knew in his heart that this was the dreadful truth. With a rising panic he clutched the edge of the table.

"I won't do it!" he said distractedly. "I'll never do it, do you understand!"

"But it will be done!" White said, and his voice was so naked with terrible decision that George looked up to see Louise coming toward the table with her sharp little footsteps. She stood over it, her mouth working angrily, and then through the confusion of his thoughts he heard her voice echoing the same words again and again. "You fool!" she was saying wildly. "It's this chess! I've had enough of it!" And suddenly she swept her hand over the board and dashed the pieces from it.

"No!" cried George, not at Louise's gesture, but at the sight of White standing before her, the heavy poker raised in his hand. "No!" George shouted again, and started up to block the fall of the poker, but knew even as he did so that it was too late.

Louise might have been dismayed at the untidy way her remains were deposited in the official basket; she would certainly have cried aloud (had she been in a condition to do so) at the unsightly scar on the polished woodwork made by the basket as it was dragged along the floor and borne out of the front door. Inspector Lund, however, merely closed the door casually behind the little cortege and turned back to the living room.

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Obviously the Lieutenant had completed his interrogation of the quiet little man seated in the chair next to the chess table, and obviously the Lieutenant was not happy. He paced the center of the floor, studying his notes with a furrowed brow, while the little man watched him, silent and motionless.

"Well?" said Inspector Lund.

"Well," said the Lieutenant, "there's just one thing that doesn't tie in. From what I put together, here's a guy who's living his life all right, getting along fine, and all of a sudden he finds he's got another self, another personality. He's like a man split into two parts, you might say."

"Schizoid," remarked Inspector Lund. "That's not unusual."

"Maybe not," said the Lieutenant. "Anyhow, this other self is no good at all, and sure enough it winds up doing this killing."

"That all seems to tie in," said Inspector Lund. "What's the hitch?"

"Just one thing," the Lieutenant stated: "a matter of identity." He frowned at his notebook, and then turned to the little man in the chair next to the chess table. "What did you say your name was?" he demanded.

The little man drew his lips into a faintly sardonic grimace of rebuke. "Why, I've told you that so many times before, Lieutenant, surely you couldn't have forgotten it again." The little man smiled pleasantly. "My name is White."

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WINNER OF A THIRD PRIZE: OLIVER LA FARGE

When Oliver La Farge was a child, he was called, at his own insistence, "Indian Man." His intense interest in American Indians, and his even more intense sympathy with their problems, has dated from those earliest days in his life. Today, a mature man, deeply tanned from his outdoor activities, with black hair, long arms, and the very walk of a Red Man, Mr. La Farge is often mistaken by Indians as one of their own race; and this acceptance by the Indians themselves is wholly understandable: surely Mr. La Farge, more than any other white man in America, has earned the right to be the Indians' spokesman. From 1933 to 1937, he was president of the National Association on Indian Affairs, and from 1937 he has held the same high position in the American Association on Indian Affairs.

When his first novel, LAUGHING BOY, *about the Navajos, won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1929, Mr. La Farge created a schism in the ranks of his followers: anthropologists hoped that he would not pursue a literary career and would remain the outstanding figure that he is in their field, and writers, to say nothing of readers, hoped that he would continue to write stories about American Indians, whom he depicted as real men and women, with the emotions, thoughts, and speech of flesh-and-blood human beings. Mr. La Farge proceeded to satisfy both camps: he is still authoritatively involved in anthropological, ethnological, and archeological research, and he still writes tales of the American Indian in which he reveals an "accurate observation and sensitive understanding of the complex Indian psychology, and respect for their cultural dignity."*

"Woman Hunt No Good" is an authentic study of an Indian Chief of Police and his investigation of murder on the Golquain Apache reservation.

WOMAN HUNT NO GOOD

by OLIVER LA FARGE

CLOSE BY the logging road which leads to Soldier Spring, a young man and woman were moving along together in the crisp morning of the first day of the deer and turkey season. They were hunting, with permission, on the Golquain Apache reservation, a wide territory in which

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there is a fair amount of game, and in which one may go in the likelihood of meeting no other hunters.

The man carried a rifle, the woman was unarmed. This was at once a hunting trip and a lovers' escapade. Their being together cast a special enchantment over the fragrant pine woods. They did not touch each other, they spoke little, but their attention was not fully upon the hunt.

Barbara McDonough's father objected to her friendship with Paul Lincoln. An objection by John McDonough was not to be taken lightly. He was Sheriff of Cuervo County, dominated its Republican party, and ruled the town of Arenosa. He counted his timber and grazing leases by the square mile. In Cuervo County, where so much of the old West still survives, a man who reaches such a position is one who cannot be pushed around. He objected to Lincoln, first, because he was an Easterner with a Harvard accent. Further, he was an anthropologist, hence a long-hair, to be suspected of a sloppy sentimentality towards mankind in general and Indians in particular. He was a man destined to eke out his life as a professor unless he succeeded in luring an innocent Western girl, endowed with a rancher's fortune, into matrimony.

The young man's appearance justified none of these suspicions. He looked like a solid character. He had curly hair, gray eyes, a good mouth, and was built like the halfback he had been. His college friends, or his fellow officers on the destroyer escort on which he served during the war, would have agreed that he was a man who would always make his way for himself.

Barbara McDonough inherited her black hair and blue-green eyes from her mother. Her firm jaw was a rounded, feminine version of her father's, and with it she had inherited the strength to resist his strength. Hence, unknown to him, she was out this morning with Paul.

The relationship had developed unconsciously since he arrived at Arenosa to study the Golquain Apaches for his Ph.D. They thought of it as friendship — neither had admitted up to now that it was the great thing, the thing for life. Getting off this morning together had had about it a suggestion of elopement. Discovery came close, their feelings intensified, they had been self-conscious with each other until the activity of hunting and the peace of the woods relaxed them.

Paul stopped and pointed to the clear tracks of a good-sized buck. "Fresh," he whispered, "he may be near." He raised his head, feeling the wind. The tracks led into it, westward, which was good. Their attention centered on their hunting as they went forward cautiously. They had been moving slowly along for an hour; they had heard one distant shot near dawn, but seen no sign till now. What had been a routine procedure became real and acute.

They tracked the buck for about

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half a mile. An opening showed ahead of them. Paul stopped behind a pair of young spruce trees to reconnoiter, Barbara immediately halting behind him. He took a cautious step, keeping close to the trees. The open space was about a hundred yards wide and perhaps twice that length from north to south. On the west edge, facing him, was a fringe of young aspen and mountain mahogany.

He froze. The girl, watching him, stiffened in response, her eyes bright. She could not see what he saw, and she knew too much to move. He raised his gun, waited, fired, the shot almost blasphemously loud in the stillness. There was a sound of crashing through underbrush. Paul ran forward, then turned right, still running. Barbara stepped past the little trees. Paul had reached the north end of the clearing and stood staring into a clump of oak brush. Barbara saw that the logging road was just beyond. He turned abruptly and came back to her, walking slowly, his face grave.

"What is it?"

He drew in a short, audible breath. "There's a dead man in there."

"Paul!"

"Yes, an Indian. Shot in the head. I'd better take you back and then report it at the Agency."

"You couldn't have —?"

"No. Impossible. It's more than a right angle."

They walked rapidly, in silence, back along their own trail to the car. When they were in it, before he started the motor, he said, "I'm sorry, Babs."

"It's not your fault. It is a shock, though. Who was it, did you see?"

"I didn't look closely. Guess I'm squeamish. But it looked like old Gotahni." In his mild, academic way he gave the name its exact Apache inflection.

"Old Go-tawny? That's too bad."

"Yes. Wonderful old character. Lord, what knowledge has died with him."

As they approached the first adobe houses on the edge of Arenosa, she said, "Take me to Lucy's, remember. I'm supposed to be spending the day with her."

"Oh. That's right. I hate seeing you like this, pretending, covering up. As if it were wrong, when I know it isn't. . . ."

"Yes. I feel that, too."

He dropped his hand over hers for a moment. The thing was almost out — they both knew they knew. Then Barbara gave a dismayed little "Oh!" and took her hand away. "We shouldn't talk like this, with him lying dead there."

It is reported that certain mild, recurrent seismic disturbances which have been recorded at Fordham University are caused by Fenimore Cooper spinning in his grave when Spotted Shield, Chief of Police of the Golquain Agency, emerges into the morning. Spotted Shield thus emerged just before eight o'clock. He had, as a matter of fact, been up and about

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since before sunrise, thereby acquiring an excellent appetite which he had satisfied with a sound breakfast centering about broiled goat's-ribs. Now, as he took the sun on his face, he gave vent to a comfortable belch while he rolled himself a cigarette.

Spotted Shield stood five feet eight inches, weighed one hundred and seventy pounds, and was only slightly fat. His broad, solid face was faintly pock-marked. His mustache did not cover his upper lip, but grew at the sides of it, forming parentheses on either side of his mouth. He looked like a Mandarin with a touch of Eskimo. He looked dull; his face, his black eyes, were impenetrable. His mouth was wide and firm. The color of his face and hands was that of a well-worn saddle.

He wore a black-and-white checked flannel shirt, with beaded sleeve garters. An extremely valuable necklace of purple-brown shell, which most white men would not even notice, was partly hidden by an old, blue serge vest, worn unbuttoned. A small flint arrowhead was tied to the top buttonhole, his badge was pinned to the left upper pocket. His trousers, woollen Army surplus, looked as if they had been slept in. They had. His gun, a single-action, long-barreled Colt's .45 in a worn leather holster, hung low on his hip from an equally-worn cartridge belt, buckled with a butterfly-shaped Navajo buckle of turquoise and silver. His shoes were also Army surplus. Their original soles had been replaced with rawhide, so that they had the walking qualities of moccasins.

His hat was a pre-war style Army felt, rather perched on his head, which with its heavy hair seemed oversize. The crown of the hat was undented. The hatband was a circle of silver, to which at one side a small, plume-like, downy eagle-feather was attached. From under the hat, just behind his ears, his braids hung, long and solid. They were wrapped in green and orange tape, criss-crossing, with a bit of otter fur at the top of the wrapping, broad, red elastic bands at the bottom. The average observer would deem Spotted Shield adequately adorned, at least for an ordinary work day. He himself, as he enjoyed his cigarette, was thinking about a lack which had long plagued him. There had been talk once of deputizing him in the county, so that when necessary he could pick up Apaches in Arenosa, which was no lily of a town. The plan had been dropped. It had left him with the realization that by this means he could have two badges. He had never seen a policeman with two badges, and he longed for that distinction.

He strolled down the road which became the main street along which most of the Agency buildings were strung. He stopped in front of the Administration Building. Whether or not he could read numbers, Spotted Shield could tell the important hours of the day on the clock in the little tower. It was now about a quarter of an hour short of eight thirty, when it

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was his duty to see to it that the flag was hoisted and the bell rung. He lingered near the flagpole in the sun. The jail and police station were diagonally across the street; Feather's Son, carried on the tribal rolls as Calvin C. Roosevelt (his father had been enrolled as Theodore), was in the doorway. As he did not signal, Spotted Shield knew that there was nothing new.

Mr. Blair, the Chief Accountant, came down the road in his shiny, new sedan and parked near Spotted Shield. He got out on the driver's side, slammed the door, and came towards the Administration Building. Blair was early, which was unusual. The Apache did not like him — in which he was by no means unique — therefore, he watched for anything about him worth noticing.

Blair said, "Morning, Spotty."

"Mornin'. My t'ought you go hunt you buck. Firss day now."

Blair stopped to answer. "Too dry. You'd make so much noise you couldn't get near anything, and the ground's too dry for tracking. I decided to wait." He went on.

Mr. Blair had had a drink. Spotty knew a good deal about drinking, much from observation, some from first-hand experience. The signs were not of a stale left-over from last night, which one would expect, but of whiskey just now taken and insufficiently disguised with peppermint. Unusual, therefore interesting, was the early hour; everyone knew that Blair brought liquor onto the reservation, and got away with it because he was a white man and important. Some day Whittrup, the agent, would get tough, Spotty thought, but when? Whittrup tended to dodge unpleasantness, then when he did act, to act too violently.

The policeman wandered over to the sedan. The window on the near side was open, although the door was locked. That was bad, with so many kids around. If anything was taken he'd be blamed. There was nothing visible to be stolen. He reached in, pressed the button, and opened the door. The glove compartment was unlocked. There just might be a bottle there, in which case he would have Blair cold. The compartment contained the usual oddments, plus a woman's handkerchief with a single initial on it, a red hunting cap, and a box of Winchester 30-30 cartridges. Some cartridges had been taken from it. The ashtray had been left pulled out. It contained a number of cigarettes, some of them stained with lipstick. He closed ashtray and compartment, rolled up the window, set the catch, and locked the door. Then he went on to the police station.

Evidently Blair had started out hunting, with a woman along, which was no way to hunt. Most likely they had quarreled, both of them got upset, Blair took a drink and left his car untidy. His rifle was probably in the back compartment.

Feather's Son had served four years in the Marines. He wore the Army blouse and slacks of his police

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uniform smartly. A ten-gallon hat, a red silk scarf, and cowboy boots added dash to the outfit. Spotted Shield told him to attend to the bell and the flag. He himself was going to see Juan Natsitty about his black horse.

Paul Lincoln stopped his car abruptly across the road from the Administration Building and crossed the road almost at a run. Inside the office, the Apache girl at the desk nearest the Superintendent's door stopped him. "Mr. Whittrup's busy."

"This is urgent. A man has been killed."

Blair looked up from his desk. "What did you say?"

"I was hunting and I found a dead man. Shot."

Blair came around his desk. "Let's go in."

Paul followed him through the inner door. The Superintendent, who was dictating, looked up in annoyance. When he heard the news, his expression changed entirely. Paul told his story, leaving out only those facts that might involve Barbara.

Whittrup stood up. "We'd better go see."

Blair said, "I'll get my car," and hurried from the room.

Rather dramatically, Whittrup took an automatic in an under-arm holster from the wall and put it on before he donned his mackinaw. "Come along."

Near the spot, Blair drove as if the road were worse than it was, picking his way carefully. Paul said, "Just ahead, where you see that oak-brush," and then, "here." The car stopped. The three men got out and looked into the low-growing brush.

Whittrup said, "It's Go-tawny all right. Through the head."

Paul nodded. "The medicine man."

Blair asked, "Didn't he say he was going to run you off the reservation for poking into the ceremonies?"

"He did, but he was getting over it."

Whittrup said, "Tell us what happened again."

Paul went over his story. Blair walked around the brush and stood inspecting the open space. He called to the Superintendent, "Adolph, come here." Paul stayed where he was. He did not want them to go looking farther back, lest they see Barbara's tracks. He saw the two men consult together, looking down at something. Then they came back to him.

Whittrup asked mildly, "You came straight to the Agency as soon as you found him?"

"Of course."

Whittrup sighed, and as he did, he drew the automatic, cocking it. "I'm afraid we'll have to lock you up, Mr. Lincoln. It looks bad."

"You're crazy. I tell you I shot at a buck way over there. I don't make wild shots. You know that."

"Yes, we know that. That's part of the trouble. Your story's wrong. I was in town at eight thirty, and I saw you there in your car."

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"Why — I —"

"Look, we're not trying you. We just have to hold you. You'll have plenty of chance to explain. Now, come along."

Calvin C. Roosevelt was at the door of the jail when they drove up. Whittrup told Blair to get over to the office and telephone McDonough right away. He and Calvin locked up the prisoner. Paul had not spoken since they started the return trip. His lips were compressed and he was pale.

When Spotted Shield returned, Feather's Son told him, "Things have been happening, my grandfather."

"What things?"

"Gotahni-n."

The simple name, with the *-n* of respect for the dead added to it, conveyed a complete message. Spotted Shield covered his mouth with his hand for a moment. Then he asked, "In what manner?"

"He was shot, they say. Agent and Blair brought in Lincoln and we locked him up. Then Sheriff came. Agent was excited, he talked a lot. Lincoln says he shot at a buck, then turned, went forward, and found that one when he hoped to cut the buck's trail, and that then he hurried here to tell about it, he says. Agent says he was in town just a little while ago and saw him there. He says he found a shell from his rifle in his tracks pointing towards that one, where he was found. No question, he says. Lincoln had stepped on the shell as he went forward, he says."

"Where was this?" Feather's Son told him. Spotted Shield squatted and drew a recognizable capital E on the ground. "You know this paper-track?"

"Yes."

"What woman here could it belong to?"

"Miss Raymond at the school, or Mrs. Lannigan."

"Is that his car?" He pushed his lips outward towards Lincoln's roadster.

"Yes."

"Where is Tommy?" Tomás Aragón was the third member of the tribal police.

"He should be at the corral by now. He was bringing in those horses."

"Tell him to saddle up and go watch where that one lies. Then see if Lincoln's car can be locked up. Lock it up and watch it. See what name of cartridges he uses. I am going over to listen."

He went to the office. The girl at the desk by Whittrup's door made no attempt to stop him. She lowered her eyes and greeted him respectfully in Apache. He said, "Little sister," and opened the door. Inside, McDonough sat on the Superintendent's desk, speaking Spanish into the telephone. The Superintendent sat in his desk chair, the Chief Clerk in another, Blair was standing. The Sheriff said, "Hello, Spotty." He listened at the 'phone, spoke again, then hung up. "He's left his house but he isn't at the courthouse or his own office yet. I've

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left word for him to call back *pronto*. Spotty, we got a case. Murder."

"My know. Too bad."

"You better send someone to stand guard. I want to hear from Salazar, then I go look." Salazar was the District Attorney.

"My send guard. Him gone now."

"Good."

Whittrup said thoughtfully, "Murder? Do you think it's really murder?"

"Unless it turns out to be a ricochet. That fellow's a good shot."

"But why? You don't kill for nothing."

"You can't tell with a professor like him. Go-tawny was blocking his investigations, threatened to run him off the reservation, like Walter says. So then he can't write his thesis or whatever you call it, so he doesn't get his degree, and likely he gets fired. Then his career—" The telephone interrupted. McDonough picked it up. "It's for you, Spotty."

Spotted Shield took the instrument gingerly. In Apache, Feather's Son said, "Come to the jail, grandfather. There is something for you here. Come now."

Spotted Shield said, "I go jail-side litty bit. Come back soon."

Feather's Son met him outside the door. "Stand at the window where you can see. I shall listen here. This you should know."

McDonough's daughter faced Lincoln against the bars, her two hands clasped in his. The Chief of Police watched them closely.

Barbara said, "I've got to tell him I was there. I can clear you. You couldn't have done it."

"No, absolutely not. This whole thing is ridiculous and I won't have you mixed up in it."

"But Dad's against you — He'll try to pin it on you. And murder—"

"I know, Babs, but he can't make it stick. In a pinch, all right, you can come forward. But they play rough around here. Salazar's a Democrat; he works with your father, but if he can embarrass him he will. The first thing you know, he'd hold you as an accessory."

"We-ell, he might."

"Promise me you won't say anything. Oh, Babs, let's stop fooling. I love you. I love you for keeps. I don't want you mixed up in this. Promise me."

"I'll wait. That's all I can promise. I'll wait a little. But I'm not going to let you stay locked up in jail, and that's that. I can't stand it."

The kiss, as good a kiss as could be managed between bars, amused Spotted Shield. Paul said, "Now hurry, darling, before your father comes around."

Barbara blushed when she confronted the two policemen. To Calvin she said, "Thank you." Spotty said, "Mornin'." She hesitated a moment. She had always liked him, but what could he do? She hurried towards her car, parked out of sight near the Trading Post.

Feather's Son gave the Chief an accurate summary of what the two had

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said. The old man grunted. "All the hunters had women with them this morning, no wonder there has been trouble. What about his cartridges?" Feather's Son told him he had Western cartridges for a Winchester 30-30. Spotted Shield gave him some further, careful instructions. Then he returned to the office.

McDonough was on the telephone again. He put it down. "Salazar wants me and at least one good witness to go over those tracks together. The case depends on them. Then you can move the body. Anybody want to come?"

Spotty said, "My come. My savvy tlack. Him no." As he said "him" he indicated the others by pointing with his lips.

The Sheriff reflected. Old Spotty really knew his tracking, and from long practice, speaking through an interpreter, he made an excellent witness. "All right. Tell us where this is, Adolph."

The Apache clerk came in with some letters. The Superintendent answered slowly, "We-ell, it's on the road to Soldier Spring, about seven miles from here. You—" He hesitated.

Spotty spoke to the girl, She said, "He says he knows where it is."

The Sheriff looked at Spotty. He spoke to the girl again. "You go on that road, over the third hill, he says. There is a white stone on the right side of the road, and on the left side a crooked tree. Then you come to that oak-brush, he says."

"I don't know about the tree," Whittrup said, "but that sounds like the spot."

The girl interpreted again. "He says, please, the men who were there this morning hold up their feet so that he can know their tracks. He wants to see Mr. Lincoln's tracks too, he says."

Blair and Whittrup raised their feet, the Sheriff and Spotty inspected them gravely. They went to the jail and looked at Lincoln's. Then they set out in the Sheriff's sedan.

Tommy Aragón stood guard as far from the corpse as duty would allow. He was glad to have company. Spotty spoke with him briefly, then worked along the road, examining it minutely. The Sheriff followed suit, although he didn't see anything of interest. It would be well to be able to testify that no unexplained signs existed and that nothing had been overlooked.

At the oak clump they turned and peered in. Both of them recognized the dead man. The Sheriff squatted down beside him. Spotty came near enough and bent low enough to see well, but kept as far from contamination as he could. As it was, he would have to have himself cleansed, and this man, whose body lay here, was the one to whom always before he had gone for that.

The Sheriff pointed to the hole where the bullet had entered. "That's no ricochet." He studied the entrance and exit. "30-30, or near that. I'll

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send some men to help you look for the bullet. It should be near."

"Oll hraight." It was the only word in English in which he had achieved the sound of *r*.

They passed into the clearing. Lincoln's tracks were plain, coming up to the clump, stopping, returning. The shell he had stepped on as he hurried forward gleamed, half-buried under his footprint. They studied it without touching it. "Looks fresh. 30-30, all right." Spotty grunted agreement. The slight scratch of the ejector was bright. The Sheriff straightened up. "Well, I guess that's that."

"Look litty more. Mebbe-so catch-'em witness."

"Hunh?"

"Look litty more." He said it as a direction, not a suggestion.

"Okay."

They tracked Lincoln to the twin spruces. Spotty said, "Stop here, shoot here, my tink." He looked farther back and to the right. "See. Catch'em nodder shell."

"Oh." The Sheriff studied the ground. "Look here. Is this your witness?"

A gleam of amusement showed and was hidden in Spotty's eye. "Yess."

"It's a woman — or a boy."

"Him woman. Two woman hunt t'is mornin'. Woman hunt no good."

"But who —?"

"Mebbe-so you girl."

"What?"

"Mebbe-so you girl."

"Barbara?"

"Yess."

"By George, it does look like her boot! How do you know? And say, if she knows about this, why hasn't she told me?"

"You girl want talk, Lincum say no. *Callete la boca*, him say."

"Here, what is all this?"

"Him come jail-side while you phone, say him tell you. Lincum say no. *E-do-ta jinn.* You talk, mebbe-so acksissly you, him say."

"What?"

In the course of his career Spotted Shield had acquired a considerable legal vocabulary. How he pronounced these words after he learned them was between himself and God. "Ack-sissly. Lincum say Salazar Demotlah, want tlouby you, make you girl acksissly. *Donzhonni, callete la boca*, him say."

The Sheriff lit a cigarette and gave Spotty one. Then he said slowly, first in English, then in Spanish, "You say my girl came to the jail. She wanted to tell me about this, and Lincoln told her to keep quiet because Salazar might hold her as an accessory so's to make trouble?"

"Yess."

"Hmm. Maybe that young man's better than I thought. Even so, Barbara ought to have come forward."

Spotted Shield said, "You look shell sit down here. What name shell?"

The Sheriff looked. "Western."

"Oll hraight. You come." He led the way to the other shell. "What name?"

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"Remington. Hmm. He could have had two name shells in his gun."

"Mebbe-so. Mebbe-so no. You catch'em long gun you car?"

"No."

"You do like you catch'em gun." The Indian took the position of a man ready to shoot. "Go bang. Pleass."

The Sheriff raised an imaginary rifle, and said, "Bang."

"Now shell go out." Spotty worked his right hand.

McDonough went through the motion of pumping the lever.

"Now, where shell sit down?"

"Where — hunh? Oh — well, it'll be back here somewhere."

"Now you step on him."

The Sheriff dropped his hands. "By George, Spotty, you've got something! A man moving *forward* couldn't step on a shell he'd just ejected — thrown out."

"Yess."

"Then how'd that shell get there?"

"My tink fine out load-side. Firss, fine buck him shoot'em."

They found where the buck had been browsing on mountain mahogany until he leaped away. They found blood. Then they returned to the road. The Sheriff's face was grave. He seemed slightly upset.

Traces of snow remained in the shade of the oak-brush at the south edge of the road. Spotty tried the ground. "Him cold, him hard. Mornin', sun low, all hard lound here." He pointed to a faint track. "Mornin'. Sun low time."

They moved some thirty feet down the road. "One car stop here. Bla car come light over tlack. See?"

"Ye-es. Yes. There is another track underneath, up to here."

"Now look."

"My God, another woman!" The prints were in the north ditch, where the sun hits first, as if the woman got out on the right and stood by the hood. They showed rather pointed shoes with a moderately wide heel. "You mean a woman shot him?"

"No shoot'em. 'Nodder witness. All over mans take womans, no good. Look. Man step here."

"Another poor track. This side was still frozen. But how —?"

"Man no savvy hunt. My know. Him talk hunt like damfool. Him dlive slow. Hear noise in blush, stop car, shoot, den get out an' look. Den him flight. Him tlow shell wit' him hand. Bymebye Lincum come, walk on shell."

The Sheriff searched towards the brush. "Yes. Look, he stood here — here's a good clear heel. If we can find whose that is, and the woman's —"

"My fine. What time now?"

"Ten thirty."

"Good. School chillen lun an' play now. We catch'em witness, catch'em man. Go Agency now."

Spotted Shield had him stop first at the jail. He listened carefully to Feather's Son's report, then spoke to him at length. He was still talking when Barbara's car drove up.

"Dad," she said as she got out, "I had to see you. I have to tell you

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something — about old Go-tawny."

"I know, honey. Spotty told me all about it."

"Oh!"

"Glad you came to tell me, though. Now, wait. We got business here."

Feather's Son turned to the Sheriff. He told of Spotted Shield's observations on Blair's car, and that his ammunition was Remington. He said that at recess the children told him that Miss Raymond had been cross and upset all morning. Her first name was Evelyn, to go with the handkerchief. He had spoken to her briefly. She was wearing low, brown shoes with carved toes and a fancy tongue, and moderate heels. "Mostly she wears high heels and open toes," he said. "This kind, I think you call 'em oxfords."

The Sheriff said, "Let's talk to Miss Raymond. Then we can make an arrest."

Spotty said, "Miss Laymon alltime go wit' Bla. No want talk. 'Lest him firss, den jump her sudden. She flight good, she talk."

"Maybe you're right. You think we find shoe like that track in Blair's house?"

Barbara interrupted. "First, you let Paul out."

"That's right. Turn him loose, Spotty."

When Lincoln came to the door he said, "Hello, Babs," in an ordinary tone and nodded stiffly to her father. McDonough said, "You're in the clear, Lincoln. Looks like we got a case of the kind o' huntin' a man ought to be lynched for even if he hadn't hit anything — shot from his car at a rustle in the bushes without troublin' to see what it was." Lincoln looked at the Sheriff frozen-facedly. McDonough said, awkwardly, "You hit that buck all right. Looks like you were a little high, that's all. I think we'll have our business done in the next half-hour. How's for us takin' a couple o' my horses and findin' your buck this afternoon?"

The young man understood. "I'd be glad to, sir."

Barbara gave her father's arm a squeeze.

McDonough said, "Come on, Spotty. Let's go pick him up."

"Him car go jus' now. Mebbe-so him gone, too."

"Let's go see."

In the front office, Blair's secretary said that he had been taken ill suddenly and had gone home. He expected to return after lunch. As they left, McDonough said, "Now what in hell?"

"Him see heap talk over dere. See Lincum turn loose. Tink mebbe-so better clean 'em gun, cache him t'ings."

"Well, let's go."

They set out briskly for the small building on the upper floor of which Blair lived. Paul and Barbara followed. Had they been Indians, Spotted Shield would have sent her back. Women were too much in this already. They went in the house and up the stairs. From the room above, through the door, they heard the

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sound of a shell being ejected from a rifle. McDonough drew his pistol as he took hold of the door-knob. Spotted Shield stepped back and slightly to one side, in a covering position. This was white men's business, he would take part only in a crisis. Lincoln stepped up on McDonough's left, partly blocking Spotty. Barbara stood against the far wall, close to the Indian.

McDonough flung the door open. Spotted Shield got a brief, incomplete view of Blair seated, his rifle across his lap, cleaning equipment on the floor, on the dresser behind him his hunting cap, the box of cartridges, and a bottle of whiskey. The Sheriff said, "All right, Blair —"

He got no further. Blair swung the rifle, his right hand traveling in a flash from lever to trigger. As he fired, Lincoln hurled his weight against the Sheriff, throwing him down and into the room, himself almost falling on top of him. Blair was pumping another cartridge into the chamber. His eyes were wild.

Spotted Shield's hand closed on the butt of his gun. He had half-drawn it, and his right index finger was alongside the trigger, when there was a gasp beside him and two hands froze on his arm in an instant of panic. He jerked, the hands let go, and the girl gasped again, in a different tone. The moment had gone by. Lincoln swept the rifle aside with his left hand, so that the second bullet went into the wall. Then his fist landed on Blair's chin and sent him and his chair endways. Spotty let the gun drop back into its holster. He did not look at the girl.

There was no more fight. McDonough handcuffed Blair. Miss Raymond, called out of class and confronted sternly, told her story with hysterical completeness. They took the prisoner to the Sheriff's car. "Mebbe-so you deppity me, help take 'em jail," Spotty said.

"Deputize you, Spotty?" McDonough smiled. "No need to bother you. Paul will drive, and I'll cover him. Thanks just the same."

Barbara said, "Thanks for everything."

"Yess."

Over the noon meal he discussed the case with Feather's Son. "As soon as Agent said that Lincoln stepped on the shell from his own gun, you should have known something was wrong," he said. Later he commented, "McDonough's daughter was ashamed. Holding my arm like that might have cost her man's life. But she lost herself only for a moment, then she recovered. She could not help it — these things are not women's business. All those women out hunting, no wonder there was trouble." He nodded, and said in English, for emphasis:

"Woman hunt no good."

Watch EQ on TV

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Advice to a young author in France from W. Somerset Maugham, one of the master tale-tellers of our time — "recipe for success": "Begin by writing a tragedy in five acts, and put the manuscript in a drawer. At the end of three or four months, take it out and change it into a comedy in three acts. After another three or four months, take it out again and make it into a one-act curtain raiser. That done, marry a rich American girl."

Mr. Maugham has not only grown mellow, he has grown merry; or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that in a nodding moment Mr. Maugham has put his chips on cynicism instead of sincerity. Be as it may, we don't believe a word of it — unless Mr. Maugham is willing to rewrite his advice by simply deleting the last sentence. But translated into 'tec terms, no one would seriously advise a beginner to write a full-length deductive mystery novel, and put the manuscript in a drawer; then after three or four months, take it out and change it into a Had-I-But-Known novelette; then after another three or four months, take it out again and make it a short-story thriller; then, going Mr. Maugham one better, wait another three or four months and condense it to a suspense short-short; and finally, that done, marry the publisher's daughter. This is sabotage — if not treason! If all young writers followed this advice, we'd have to close up shop and retire to a lamasery — or, as Louis Untermeyer once remarked at a BSI dinner, "and so Tibet."

THE POINT OF HONOR

by W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

SOME YEARS AGO, BEING ENGAGED on writing a book about Spain in the Golden Age, I had occasion to read again the plays of Calderón. Among others I read one called *El Médico de Su Honra*, which means The Physician of His Honor. It is a cruel play and you can hardly read it without a shudder. But rereading it, I was reminded of an encounter I had had many years before which has always remained in my memory as one of the strangest I have ever had. I was quite young then and I had gone to Seville on a short visit to see the celebration of the Feast of Corpus Christi. It was the height of summer and the heat was terrific. Great sail-cloths were drawn across the narrow streets, giving a grateful shade, but in the squares the sun beat down mercilessly. In the morning I watched

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the procession. It was splendid and impressive. The crowd knelt down as the Host was solemnly carried past and the Civil Guards in full uniform stood at salute to do homage to the heavenly King. And in the afternoon I joined the dense throng which was making its way to the bull ring. The cigarette girls and the sewing girls wore carnations in their dark hair and their young men were dressed in all their best. It was just after the Spanish-American War and the short, embroidered jacket, the skin-tight trousers and the broad-brimmed, low-crowned hat were still worn. Sometimes the crowd was scattered by a picador on the wretched hack that would never survive the afternoon, and the rider, with conscious pride in his picturesque costume, exchanged pleasantries with the facetious. A long line of carriages, dilapidated and shabby, overfilled with *aficionados*, that is to say fans, drove noisily along.

I went early, for it amused me to see the people gradually filling the vast arena. The cheaper seats in the sun were already packed and it was a curious effect that the countless fans made, like the fluttering of a host of butterflies, as men and women restlessly fanned themselves. In the shade, where I was sitting, the places were taken more slowly, but even there, an hour before the fight began, one had to look rather carefully for a seat. Presently a man stopped in front of me and with a pleasant smile asked if I could make room for him. When he had settled down, I took a sidelong glance at him and noticed that he was well-dressed, in English clothes, and looked like a gentleman. He had beautiful hands, small but resolute, with thin, long fingers. Wanting a cigarette, I took out my case and thought it would be polite to offer him one. He gave me a glance and accepted. He had evidently seen that I was a foreigner, for he thanked me in French.

"You are English?" he went on.

"Yes."

"How is it you haven't run away from the heat?"

I explained that I had come on purpose to see the Feast of Corpus Christi.

"After all, it's something you must come to Seville for."

Then I made some casual remark about the vast concourse of people.

"No one would imagine that Spain was bleeding from the loss of all that remained of her Empire and that her ancient glory is now nothing but a name."

"There's a great deal left."

"The sunshine, the blue sky, and the future."

He spoke dispassionately, as though the misfortunes of his fallen country were no concern of his. Not knowing what to reply, I remained silent. We waited. The boxes began to fill up. Ladies in their mantillas of black or white lace entered them and spread their Manila shawls over the front of them so as to form a gay and many-colored drapery. Now and then, when

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one of them was of particular beauty, a round of applause would greet her appearance and she would smile and bow without embarrassment. At last the president of the bullfight made his entry, the band struck up, and the fighters, all glittering in their satin, in gold and silver, marched swaggering across the ring. A minute later a great black bull charged in. Carried away by the horrible excitement of the contest I noticed, notwithstanding, that my neighbor remained cool. When a man fell and only escaped by a miracle the horns of the furious beast, and with a gasp thousands sprang to their feet he remained motionless. The bull was killed and the mules dragged out the huge carcass. I sank back exhausted.

"Do you like bullfighting?" he asked me. "Most English do, though I have noticed that in their own country they say hard enough things about it."

"Can one like something that fills one with horror and loathing? Each time I come to a fight I swear I will never go to another. And yet I do."

"It's a curious passion that leads us to delight in the peril of others. Perhaps it's natural to the human race. The Romans had their gladiators and the moderns their melodramas. It may be that it is an instinct in man to find pleasure in bloodshed and torture."

I did not answer directly.

"Don't you think that the bullfight is the reason why human life is of so little account in Spain?"

"And do you think human life is of any great value?" he asked.

I gave him a quick look, for there was an ironical tone in his voice that no one could have missed, and I saw that his eyes were full of mockery. I flushed a little, for he made me on a sudden feel very young. I was surprised at the change of his expression. He had seemed rather an amiable man, with his large soft friendly eyes, but now his face bore a look of sardonic hauteur which was a trifle disquieting. I shrank back into my shell. We said little to one another during the rest of the afternoon, but when the last bull was killed and we all rose to our feet he shook hands with me and expressed the hope that we might meet again. It was a mere politeness and neither of us, I imagine, thought that there was even a remote possibility of it.

But quite by chance, two or three days later, we did. I was in a quarter of Seville that I did not know very well. I had been that afternoon to the palace of the Duke of Alba which I knew had a fine garden and in one of the rooms a magnificent ceiling reputed to have been made by Moorish captives before the fall of Granada. It was not easy to gain admittance, but I wanted very much to see it and I thought that now, in the height of summer when there were no tourists, with two or three pesetas I might be allowed in. I was disappointed. The man in charge told me that the house was under repair and no stranger could visit it without

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a written permission from the Duke's agent. So, having nothing else to do, I went to the royal garden of the Alcázar, the old palace of Don Pedro the Cruel, whose memory lives still among the people of Seville. It was very pleasant among the orange trees and cypresses. I had a book with me, a volume of Calderón, and I sat there for a while and read. Then I went for a stroll. In the older parts of Seville the streets are narrow and tortuous. It is delicious to wander along them under the awnings that stretch above, but not easy to find one's way. I lost mine. When I had just made up my mind that I had no notion in which direction to turn I saw a man walking towards me and recognized my acquaintance of the bull ring. I stopped him and asked whether he could direct me. He remembered me.

"You'll never find your way," he smiled, turning round. "I'll walk a little with you until you can't mistake it."

I protested, but he would not listen. He assured me it was no trouble.

"You haven't gone away then?" he said.

"I'm leaving tomorrow. I've just been to the Duke of Alba's house. I wanted to see that Moorish ceiling of his, but they wouldn't let me in."

"Are you interested in Arabic art?"

"Well, yes. I've heard that that ceiling is one of the finest things in Seville."

"I think I could show you one as good."

"Where?"

He looked at me for a moment reflectively as though wondering what sort of a person I was. If he was he evidently came to a satisfactory decision.

"If you have ten minutes to spare I will take you to it."

I thanked him warmly and we turned back and retraced our steps. We chatted of indifferent things till we came to a large house, washed in pale green, with the Arabic look of a prison, the windows on the street heavily barred, which so many houses in Seville have. My guide clapped his hands at the gateway and a servant looked out from a window into the patio, and pulled a cord.

"Whose house is this?"

"Mine."

I was surprised, for I knew how jealously Spaniards guarded their privacy and how little inclined they were to admit strangers into their houses. The heavy iron gate swung open and we walked into the courtyard; we crossed it and went through a narrow passage. Then I found myself suddenly in an enchanted garden. It was walled on three sides, with walls as high as houses; and their old red brick, softened by time, was covered with roses. They clad every inch in wanton, scented luxuriance. In the garden, growing wildly, as if the gardeners had striven in vain to curb the exuberance of nature, were palm trees rising high into the air in their passionate desire for the sun, dark orange trees and trees in flower

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whose names I did not know, and among them roses and more roses. The fourth wall was a Moorish loggia, with horseshoe arches heavily decorated with tracery, and when we entered this I saw the magnificent ceiling. It was like a little bit of the Alcázar, but it had not suffered the restorations that have taken all the charm from that palace, and the colors were exquisitely tender. It was a gem.

"Believe me, you need not regret that you have not been able to see the Duke's house. Further, you can say that you have seen something that no other foreigner has seen within living memory."

"It's very kind of you to have shown it to me. I'm infinitely grateful."

He looked about him with a pride with which I could sympathize.

"It was built by one of my own ancestors in the time of Don Pedro the Cruel. It is very likely that the King himself more than once caroused under this ceiling with my ancestor."

I held out the book I was carrying.

"I've just been reading a play in which Don Pedro is one of the important characters."

"What is the book?"

I handed it to him and he glanced at the title. I looked about me.

"Of course, what adds to the beauty is that wonderful garden," I said. "The whole impression is incredibly romantic."

The Spaniard was evidently pleased with my enthusiasm. He smiled. I had already noticed how grave his smile was. It hardly dispelled the habitual melancholy of his expression.

"Would you like to sit down for a few minutes and smoke a cigarette?"

"I should love to."

We walked out into the garden and we came upon a lady sitting on a bench of Moorish tiles like those in the gardens of the Alcázar. She was working at some embroidery. She looked up quickly, evidently taken aback to see a stranger, and gave my companion an enquiring stare.

"Allow me to present you to my wife," he said.

The lady gravely bowed. She was very beautiful, with magnificent eyes, a straight nose with delicate nostrils and a pale smooth skin. In her black hair, abundant as with most Spanish women, there was a broad white streak. Her face was quite unlined and she could not have been more than thirty.

"You have a very lovely garden, Señora," I said.

She gave it an indifferent glance.

"Yes, it is pretty."

I felt suddenly embarrassed. I did not expect her to show me any cordiality and I could not blame her if she thought my intrusion merely a nuisance. There was something about her that I could not quite make out. It was not an active hostility. Absurd as it seemed, since she was a young woman and beautiful, I felt that there was something dead in her.

"Are you going to sit here?" she asked her husband.

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"With your permission. Only for a few minutes."

"I won't disturb you."

She gathered her silks and the canvas on which she had been working and rose to her feet. When she stood up I saw that she was rather taller than Spanish women generally are. She gave me an unsmiling bow. She carried herself with a sort of royal composure and her gait was stately. I was flippant in those days and I remember saying to myself that she was not the sort of girl you could very well think of being silly with. We sat down on the multicolored red bench and I gave my host a cigarette. I held a match to it. He had still my volume of Calderón in his hands and now he idly turned the pages.

"Which of the plays have you been reading?"

"*El Médico de Su Honra.*"

He gave me a look and I thought I discerned in his large eyes a sardonic glint.

"And what do you think of it?"

"I think it's revolting. The fact is, of course, that the idea is so foreign to our modern notions."

"What idea?"

"The point of honor and all that sort of thing."

I should explain that the point of honor is the mainspring of much of the Spanish drama. It is the nobleman's code that impels a man to kill his wife, in cold blood, not only if she has been unfaithful to him, but even if, however little she was to blame, her conduct has given rise to scandal. In this particular play there is an example of this more deliberate than any I have ever read: the physician of his honor takes vengeance on his wife, though aware that she is innocent, simply as a matter of decorum.

"It's in the Spanish blood," said my friend. "The foreigner must just take it or leave it."

"Oh, come, a lot of water has flowed down the Guadalquivir since Calderón's day. You're not going to pretend that any man would behave like that now."

"On the contrary I pretend that even now a husband who finds himself in such a humiliating and ridiculous position can only regain his self-respect by the offender's death."

I did not answer. It seemed to me that he was pulling a romantic gesture and within me I murmured, Bosh. He gave me an ironic smile.

"Have you ever heard of Don Pedro Aguria?"

"Never."

"The name is not unknown in Spanish history. An ancestor was Admiral of Spain under Philip II and another was bosom friend to Philip IV. By royal command he sat for his portrait to Velásquez."

My host hesitated a moment. He gave me a long, reflective stare before he went on.

"Under the Philips the Agurias were rich, but by the time my friend Don Pedro succeeded his father their circumstances were much reduced.

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But still he was not poor, he had estates between Cordova and Aguilar, and in Seville his house retained at least traces of its ancient splendor. The little world of Seville was astonished when he announced his engagement to Soledad, the daughter of the ruined Count of Acaba, for though her family was distinguished her father was an old scamp. He was crippled with debts and the shifts he resorted to in order to keep his head above water were none too nice. But Soledad was beautiful and Don Pedro madly in love with her. They were married. He adored her with the vehement passion of which perhaps only a Spaniard is capable. But he discovered to his dismay that she did not love him. She was kind and gentle. She was a good wife and a good housekeeper. She was grateful to him. But that was all. He thought that when she had a child she would change, but the child came, and it made no difference. The barrier between them that he had felt from the beginning was still there. He suffered. At last he told himself that she had a character too noble, a spirit too delicate, to descend to earthly passion, and he resigned himself. She was too high above him for mortal love."

I moved a little uneasily in my seat. I thought the Spaniard was unduly rhetorical. He went on.

"You know that here in Seville the Opera House is open only for the six weeks after Easter, and since the Sevillans don't care very much for European music we go more to meet our friends than to listen to the singers. The Agurias had a box, like everybody else, and they went on the opening night of the season. *Tannhäuser* was being given. Don Pedro and his wife, like typical Spaniards, with nothing to do all day but always late, did not arrive till nearly the end of the first act. In the interval the Count of Acaba, Soledad's father, came into the box accompanied by a young officer of artillery whom Don Pedro had never seen before. But Soledad seemed to know him well.

" 'Here is Pepe Alvarez,' said the Count. 'He's just come back from Cuba and I insisted on bringing him to see you.'

"Soledad smiled and held out her hand, then introduced the newcomer to her husband.

" 'Pepe is the son of the attorney at Carmona. We used to play together when we were children.'

"Carmona is a small town near Seville and it was here that the Count had retired when his creditors in the city grew too troublesome. The house he owned there was almost all that was left him of the fortune he had squandered. He lived in Seville now through Don Pedro's generosity. But Don Pedro did not like him and he bowed stiffly to the young officer. He guessed that his father the attorney and the Count had been concerned together in transactions that were none too reputable. In a minute he left the box to talk with his cousin, the Duchess of Santaguador, whose

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box was opposite his own. A few days later he met Pepe Alvarez at his club in the Sierpes and had a chat with him. To his surprise he found him a very pleasant young fellow. He was full of his exploits in Cuba and he related them with humor.

"The six weeks about Easter and the great Fair are the gayest in Seville and the world meets to exchange gossip and laughter at one festivity after another. Pepe Alvarez with his good nature and high spirits was in great request and the Agurias met him constantly. Don Pedro saw that he amused Soledad. She was more vivacious when he was there and her laughter, which he had so seldom heard, was a delight to him. Like other members of the aristocracy he took a booth for the Fair where they danced, supped and drank champagne till dawn. Pepe Alvarez was always the life and soul of the parties.

"One night Don Pedro was dancing with the Duchess of Santaguador and they passed Soledad with Pepe Alvarez.

" 'Soledad is looking very beautiful this evening,' she remarked.

" 'And happy;' he replied.

" 'Is it true that once she was engaged to be married to Pepe Alvarez?'

" 'Of course not.'

"But the question startled him. He had known that Soledad and Pepe had known one another when they were children, but it had never crossed his mind that there could have been anything between them. The Count of Acaba, though a rogue, was a gentleman by birth and it was inconceivable that he could have thought of marrying his daughter to the son of a provincial attorney. When they got home Don Pedro told his wife what the duchess had said and what he had replied.

" 'But I was engaged to Pepe,' she said.

" 'Why did you never tell me?'

" 'It was finished and done with. He was in Cuba. I never expected to see him again.'

" 'There must be people who know you were engaged to him.'

" 'I daresay. Does it matter?'

" 'Very much. You shouldn't have renewed your acquaintance with him when he returned.'

" 'Does that mean that you have no confidence in me?'

" 'Of course not. I have every confidence in you. All the same I wish you to discontinue it now.'

" 'And if I refuse?'

" 'I shall kill him.'

"They looked long into one another's eyes. Then she gave him a little bow and went to her room. Don Pedro sighed. He wondered whether she still loved Pepe Alvarez and whether it was on account of this that she had never loved him. But he would not allow himself to give way to the unworthy emotion of jealousy. He looked into his heart and was sure that it harbored no feeling of hatred for the young artilleryman. On the contrary, he liked him. This was not an affair of love or hate, but of

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honor. On a sudden he remembered that a few days before when he went to his club he noticed that the conversation suddenly failed and, looking back, he seemed to remember that several of the group who were sitting there and chatting eyed him curiously. Was it possible that he had been the subject of their conversation? He shivered a little at the thought.

"The Fair was drawing to its end and when it was over the Agurias had arranged to go to Cordova where Don Pedro had an estate which it was necessary for him to visit from time to time. He had looked forward to the peace of a country life after the turmoil of Seville. The day after this conversation Soledad, saying she was not well, stayed in the house, and she did the same the day following. Don Pedro visited her in her room morning and evening and they talked of indifferent things. But on the third day his cousin Conchita de Santaguador was giving a ball. It was the last of the season and everyone in her exclusive set would be there. Soledad, saying she was still indisposed, announced that she would stay at home.

" 'Are you refusing to go because of our conversation of the other night?' Don Pedro asked.

" 'I have been thinking over what you said. I think your demand unreasonable, but I shall accede to it. The only way I can cease my friendship with Pepe is by not going to places where I am likely to meet him.' A tremor of pain passed over her lovely face. 'Perhaps it is best.'

" 'Do you love him still?'

" 'Yes.'

"Don Pedro felt himself go cold with anguish.

" 'Then why did you marry me?'

" 'Pepe was away, in Cuba; no one knew when he would come back. Perhaps never. My father said that I must marry you.'

" 'To save him from ruin?'

" 'From worse than ruin.'

" 'I am very sorry for you.'

" 'You have been very kind to me. I have done everything in my power to prove to you that I am grateful.'

" 'And does Pepe love you?'

"She shook her head and smiled sadly.

" 'Men are different. He's young. He's too gay to love anyone very long. No, to him I'm just the friend with whom he used to play when he was a child and flirt when he was a boy. He can make jokes about the love he once had for me.'

"He took her hand and pressed it, then kissed it and left her. He went to the ball by himself. His friends were sorry to hear of Soledad's indisposition, but after expressing a proper sympathy devoted themselves to the evening's amusement. Don Pedro drifted into the card room. There was room at a table and he sat down to play *chemin de fer*. He played with extraordinary luck and made a good deal of money. One of the players laughingly asked where Soledad was that evening. Don Pedro saw an-

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other give him a startled glance, but he laughed and answered that she was safely in bed and asleep. Then an unlucky incident occurred. Some young man came into the room and addressing an artillery officer who was playing asked where Pepe Alvarez was.

" 'Isn't he here?' said the officer.

" 'No.'

"An odd silence fell upon the party. Don Pedro exercised all his self-control to prevent his face from showing what he suddenly felt. The thought flashed through his mind that Pepe was with Soledad and that those men at the table suspected it too. Oh, the shame! The indignity! He forced himself to go on playing for another hour and still he won. He could not go wrong. The game broke up and he returned to the ballroom. He went up to his cousin.

" 'I've hardly had a word with you,' he said. 'Come into another room and let us sit down for a little.'

" 'If you like.'

"The room was empty.

" 'Where is Pepe Alvarez tonight?' he asked casually.

" 'I can't think.'

" 'You were expecting him?'

" 'Of course.'

"She was smiling as he was, but he noticed that she looked at him sharply. He dropped his mask of casualness and, though they were alone, lowered his voice.

" 'Conchita, I beseech you to tell me the truth. Are they saying that he is Soledad's lover?'

" 'Pedrito, what an incredible question to put to me.'

"But he had seen the terror in her eyes and the sudden instinctive movement of her hand to her face.

" 'You've answered it.'

"He got up and left her. He went home and looking up from the patio saw a light in his wife's room. He went upstairs and knocked at the door. There was no answer, but he went in. To his surprise, for it was late, she was sitting up working at the embroidery upon which much of her time was spent.

" 'Why are you working at this hour?'

" 'I couldn't sleep, I couldn't read. I thought it would distract my mind if I worked.'

"He did not sit down.

" 'Soledad, I have something to tell you that must cause you pain. I must ask you to be brave. Pepe Alvarez was not at Conchita's tonight.'

" 'What is that to me?'

" 'It is unfortunate that you were not there either. Everyone at the ball thought that you were together.'

" 'That's preposterous.'

" 'I know, but that doesn't help matters. You could have opened the gate for him yourself and let him out, or you could have slipped out yourself without anyone seeing you go or come.'

" 'But do you believe it?'

" 'No. I agreed with you that the thing was preposterous. Where was Pepe Alvarez?'

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" 'How do I know? How should I know?'

" 'It is very strange that he should not have come to the most brilliant party, the last party, of the season.'

"She was silent for a minute.

" 'The night after you spoke to me about him I wrote and told him that in view of the circumstances I thought it would be better if in future we saw no more of one another than could be helped. It may be that he did not go to the ball for the same reason that I did not.'

"They were silent for a while. He looked down at the ground, but he felt that her eyes were fixed on him. I should have told you before that Don Pedro possessed one accomplishment which raised him above his fellows, but at the same time was a drawback. He was the best shot in Andalusia. Everyone knew this and it would have been a brave man who ventured to offend him. A few days earlier there had been pigeon-shooting at Tablada, the wide common outside Seville along the Guadalquivir, and Don Pedro had beaten everybody. Pepe Alvarez on the other hand had shown himself so indifferent a marksman that everyone had laughed at him. The young artilleryman had borne the chaff with good humor. Cannon were his weapon, he said.

" 'What are you going to do?' Soledad asked.

" 'You know that there is only one thing I can do.'

"She understood. But she tried to treat what he had said as a pleasantry.

" 'You're childish. We're not living any more in the sixteenth century.'

" 'I know. That is why I am talking to you now. If I have to challenge Pepe I shall kill him. I don't want to do that. If he will resign his commission and leave Spain I will do nothing.'

" 'How can he? Where is he to go?'

" 'He can go to South America. He may make his fortune.'

" 'Do you expect me to tell him that?'

" 'If you love him.'

" 'I love him too much to ask him to run away like a coward. How could he face life without honor?'

"Don Pedro laughed.

" 'What has Pepe Alvarez, the son of the attorney at Carmona, to do with honor?'

"She did not answer, but in her eyes he saw the fierce hatred she bore him. That look stabbed his heart, for he loved her as passionately as ever.

"Next day he went to his club and joined a group who were sitting at the window looking out at the crowd passing up and down the Sierpes. Pepe Alvarez was in it. They were talking of last night's party.

" 'Where were you, Pepe?' someone asked.

" 'My mother was ill. I had to go down to Carmona,' he answered. 'I was dreadfully disappointed, but perhaps it was all for the best.' He turned laughingly to Don Pedro. 'I hear you were in luck and won everybody's money.'

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" 'When are you going to give us our revenge, Pedrito?' asked another.

" 'I'm afraid you'll have to wait for that,' he answered. 'I have to go to Cordova. I find that my attorney has been robbing me. I know that all attorneys are thieves, but I stupidly thought this one was honest.'

"He seemed to speak quite lightly and it was as lightly that Pepe Alvarez put in his word.

" 'I think you exaggerate, Pedrito. Don't forget that my father is an attorney and he at least is honest.'

" 'I don't believe it for a minute,' laughed Don Pedro. 'I have no doubt your father is as big a thief as any.'

"The insult was so unexpected and so unprovoked that for a moment Pepe Alvarez was staggered. The others were startled into sudden seriousness.

" 'What do you mean, Pedrito?'

" 'Exactly what I say.'

" 'It's a lie and you know it's a lie. You must withdraw that at once.'

"Don Pedro laughed.

" 'Of course I shall not withdraw. Your father is a thief and a rascal.'

"Pepe did the only thing he could do. He sprang from his chair and with his open hand hit Don Pedro in the face. The outcome was inevitable. Next day the two men met on the frontier of Portugal. Pepe Alvarez, the attorney's son, died like a gentleman with a bullet in his heart."

The Spaniard ended his story on such a casual note that for the first moment I hardly took it in. But when I did I was profoundly shocked.

"Barbarous," I said. "It was just cold-blooded murder."

My host got up from his chair.

"You're talking nonsense, my young friend. Don Pedro did the only thing he could do in the circumstances."

I left Seville next day and from then till now have never been able to discover the name of the man who told me this strange story. I have often wondered whether the lady I saw, the lady with the pale face and the lock of white hair, was the unhappy Soledad.

Next month will be too late . . .

All manuscripts for *EQMM*'s Seventh $6,000 Detective Short Story Contest must be in by October 20th, 1951. Remember that this year, in addition to the First Prize of $2,000, four Second Prizes of $500, and four Third Prizes of $250, there will be a special Award of Merit of $1,000. Entries should be addressed to the contest at 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, New York.

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If you are a loyal and constant reader of EQMM, you may remember Jack Finney — he is one of the many writers who broke into print in the pages of this magazine. We published Jack Finney's very first story four years ago — "The Widow's Walk," in our July 1947 issue — and then included it in THE QUEEN'S AWARDS, 1947. *Almost from the day his first-published story appeared in EQMM, Jack Finney went places, and in the intervening years his work has been featured regularly in many of the high-bracket "slicks." There's no mystery about it — Jack Finney has developed a slick, sophisticated, streamlined style; his dialogue is bright; his situations are genuinely amusing; his characters combine warmth and gaiety — and who can resist those qualities these cold and gloomy days?*

"It Wouldn't Be Fair" is a funny story — really funny! You might even call it a satire on the detective story, with side-glances at such famous ferrets as Perry Mason, Hercule Poirot, Sam Spade, Father Brown, and Lord Peter Wimsey. But as a burlesque of the bloodhound business, it does not suffer from the fault of most private-eye parodies: it is not mere exaggeration, mere 'tec travesty. On the contrary, Jack Finney is smart enough to poke his fun, thrust his jibes, and generally make merry at the expense of mysterymongers and their master manhunters within the framework of a solidly contrived plot. The homicidal humor is strictly an extra dividend.

IT WOULDN'T BE FAIR

by JACK FINNEY

"SUPPOSE YOU FOUND THIS GUY dead," said Charley. He stood beside the lieutenant's desk, hands in pockets, rocking gently on his feet, a lean young man, with an intelligent face. "Murdered. Shot and poisoned in his library."

"The library?"

"*His* library; big estate in England."

The lieutenant swung his swivel chair toward the window behind him. The morning light cut across one shoulder onto a face made thin by years of insufficient sleep and grooved from decades of worry. "Out of our jurisdiction," he said.

"You investigate anyway," Charley said cheerfully, "and find that the dead guy's wife is a homicidal maniac, that her husband kicked her out into a blizzard on Christmas Eve, after squandering her fortune on another

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woman, and that she happens to own the Webley-Vebley 12-12 pistol which fired the bullet found in his brain."

"Someday," said the lieutenant, "you'll be too smart for your own good. Whatever you're up to or after, I have a feeling, amounting to a conviction, that the answer is going to be no. I never heard of a Webley-Vebley."

"Annie would not be surprised." Charley took a paper clip from the desk and, lowering his head, began carefully bending it straight. "Furthermore, the dead man's wife had run a full-page ad in the local newspaper threatening to kill him, she was alone with him during the last ten minutes of his life, and in her handbag are three African darts each tipped with a poison which kills instantly by turning the blood into putty. You suspect anybody?"

The lieutenant shrugged. "Looks like maybe the wife did it."

"Typical police stupidity." Charley tossed the paper clip at the polished spittoon on the floor and it hit with a ping, then rattled inside. "Annie has often pointed out to me that we constantly leap to conclusions on just such flimsy evidence."

The lieutenant leaned forward, hands clasped, forearms on the desk. "Okay," he said coldly, "just who is this Annie?"

"Annie is a brain. Of frightening power. A marvel at murder. But a brain bounded on the north by gorgeous brown hair, on the south by a magnificent coast line, and —"

"Spare me," said the lieutenant. "I am an old, old man. Just how does this mighty brain work?"

"While we absurd police, satisfied with our ridiculous evidence, are lounging around the station house or stealing fruit from innocent peddlers, Annie is finding the more subtle clues which blundering police methods invariably miss. And she discovers presently what she suspected all along." Charley hitched his chair closer to the lieutenant's desk. "The wife is innocent. The murdered man's aunt, who raised him from childhood, sacrificed everything to put him through college, and who has been completely paralyzed for thirty-five years except for her ears which she can still wiggle slightly —"

"She did it?"

"Exactly. The rare Webley-Vebley is the only known pistol with a trigger so sensitive it can be fired by a flick of the ear."

The lieutenant leaned back in his chair, and gazed at the ceiling for a considerable time. "Colhaus," he said finally. "You know Colhaus in the Thirteenth Precinct? He has a daughter —"

"No," said Charley, "Annie. I am not interested in anyone's daughter but Annie. You may not understand —"

"I might," said the lieutenant. "Unlikely as it may seem, I was young once. The remedy in a case like yours — I should say, the cure — is to marry the girl."

"I can't." Charley's smile disap-

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peared, and his face looked thinner. "In spite of some success during six years as a member of Homicide, Annie regards me as only a reasonably well-qualified moron in the field of murder investigation. From her experience," he said bitterly, "covering hundreds of cases, she has formed a very low opinion of police and their methods."

The lieutenant gestured with his thumb toward a huge oak-framed display cabinet which hung on the wall opposite. Its green felt surface, under the glass, was paved with dozens of overlapping photographs and deadly mementos: cruelly sharp photos of bodies in every state of violent death, sullen-faced men and women, struggling or passive, in the arms of the police, actual pistols and blackjacks wired in place.

"You were with me on those," said the lieutenant. "Some of them. You did good work; sometimes. *Tell* her about them."

"I did."

"And?"

"Crude and slipshod work. We often arrested and convicted the first guy we suspected. Sometimes, in fact, the only suspect. And often very obviously the obvious suspect. Do you realize what that means?"

"Tell me."

"They were innocent."

The lieutenant smiled bleakly. "Yes! What about the Crowley case? Clear-cut."

"It was," said Charley gravely, "but it took two weeks to break. Perhaps you thought that was fast? Tell me. You sometimes stop to eat, on a case? Even sleep?"

"Yes."

"Fool. There is no time for anything but drinking. Naturally you are pitifully slow."

"This Annie is faster?"

"She often solves cases a full forty-eight pages before Perry Mason."

The lieutenant sighed. "Just what did you have in mind?" he said.

"Well, sir." Charley selected another paper clip. "Singlehanded I have been unable to convince Annie that the murders of fiction, filled with brilliant deductions and subtle clues, have nothing to do with the facts of life. I have told her about our cases. They are dull. No African darts. No guns concealed in the wall which fire when the first frost contracts the woodwork. No hypodermic needles which inject a chemical freezing the blood to dry ice and causing the veins to explode. We don't even seem to find any footprints. So what does that mean? The answer is obvious to Annie. We are missing something. We are trampling countless delicate clues under our big flat feet. Convicting innocent men on obvious, ridiculous clues, while fiends, ingenious beyond our poor capacity to imagine, are lounging around the city laughing at us. Lieutenant, a man has to have respect from his wife."

"So?"

"So I thought, sir, we'd take Annie along on the next case. Show her a real murder —"

"No." The lieutenant stood up,

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walked out from behind his desk, and gestured at the walls of his office. "This is not a book from the rental library," he said, "with every killing an excursion trip." With his other hand he gestured at the window toward the police garage three stories below where a motorcycle idled, its vibrations gently rattling the window pane. "This is Centre Street Police Headquarters; *real* police with work to do, not a picnic for amateur mystery-story — Charley, you know better."

Charley stood up and took his hat from the lieutenant's desk. "I guess so. It's too bad, though; Nikki Porter goes everywhere with Ellery Queen."

"Colhaus —"

"No," said Charley, "Annie." He put on his hat and stood for a moment, looking at the floor. "I rather expected this. Which brings me to my final hope." He reached inside his suit coat and brought out a bright green-jacketed book which he had held concealed under his arm. "I would like you to read this. The thrilling adventures of Hercule Poirot."

"Why?" the lieutenant demanded.

"It's a very fascinating story. And I would like you to finish it" — he hesitated — "before you come with me to Annie's tomorrow night."

The lieutenant stared at Charley, his eyes narrowed. "Some day," he said, "you will be too smart for —"

"It's my only hope." Charley opened the door and began backing out. "My only chance is that your gray hairs and ancient wisdom will succeed where I have failed" — the door was closing — "in persuading Annie that the police are as competent, in a much duller way, as Agatha Christie."

Annie's living room, Charley had often noticed, was feminine and suited her perfectly. But he was not prepared, the following evening, for what it did to the lieutenant. The lieutenant — surrounded by dainty, soft-glowing lamps, pastel-tinted slip covers, bright modern paintings — looked as out of place as a bishop in a pool hall.

But Annie was superb. She sat gracefully curled in a corner of the davenport, her hair, as always, even more gloriously brunette than Charley remembered. Her softly tanned face was eager, smiling, and alive. Her large, blue, and beautiful eyes were animated. She seemed confident.

"The lieutenant read Hercule Poirot," Charley announced. "Loved it."

"Oh?" Annie looked interested; she smiled. "Did you figure it out?"

"No," said the lieutenant.

"You mean, not till the end."

"I mean," said the lieutenant — he took a swallow of his drink — "that I never *did* get it. I read the book. I finished it. Read the last chapter twice. And I still don't know who killed Aaron DeCourcey."

"But, Lieutenant. It *said*. It said *Robert* did it. He confessed."

"I know. We get those confessions all the time; they don't mean a thing." The lieutenant paused, took a thoughtful sip of his drink, then spoke de-

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cisively. "I think maybe this Lacy guy did it: Lacy Spreckles."

"But —"

"It figures," said the lieutenant. "He hated the guy, he bought the gun, he had a fake alibi, he needed the money, he was about to be written out of the will, he said he'd do it, nobody else was —"

Annie recovered her voice. "But, Lieutenant! He *couldn't* have done it! Don't you remember? About the sundial?"

"Look, young lady; we had a case two months ago —"

"Oh, those. Lieutenant, don't you remember?" said Annie pleadingly. "He and Lady Gwen were in the garden —"

"Sure, I remember! But I didn't get it."

"But it's so *simple*." She forgave him with a smile. "He and Lady Gwen noticed on the sundial in the garden that it was exactly three thirty. She remarked on it, remember? *Then* they figured out that that was *sun* time, two minutes slower than *real* time, so it was *actually* three thirty-*two*, don't you see? But then *Hercule* figured out that the sundial was over three hundred years old and during that time the revolution of the earth changed or something —"

"That's the part I didn't get."

"Well, neither did I, exactly. But anyway, the revolution changed the earth's relation to the sun, so the sundial was really *correct*, don't you see? It really *was* three thirty, so Lacy couldn't *possibly* have done it."

"I thought," said Charley tactfully, "that it could have been Lady Jane."

"No." Annie reached out to tuck Charley's tie neatly inside his coat. "It couldn't have been her, either. Remember she was in the drawing room talking to Blake? The brother-in-law? And he noticed how the sun glinted on her hair bringing out the delicate tones of red and gold? Remember?"

"I guess so," said Charley.

"Well," said Annie happily, "don't you see then? It was cloudy all day."

"Cloudy?"

"Oh, Charley!" She leaned forward impatiently and began ticking off points on her finger tips. "There was no sun all day except just *once*, for a second or so. So if Blake saw the sun on Lady Jane's hair, it *must* have been three thirty. Because that was the *only* time Lacy and Lady Gwen could have told time by the sundial in the garden!" Annie paused. "Lieutenant," she appealed, "*you* see that, don't you?"

"I guess so," said the lieutenant in a strangled voice, "except — Well, maybe the sun was out some other time, too. And nobody noticed it."

Annie slumped back on the davenport. "Of course not," she said hopelessly.

"But why?" said the lieutenant.

"Because! It just *couldn't*, that's all!"

The lieutenant glanced at Charley. "But why?" he said plaintively. "*Why?* Just tell me WHY, that's all!"

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"Lieutenant," said Annie with dangerous calm, "don't be absurd. The sun *couldn't* because — why, it wouldn't be *fair!*"

There was a long silence during which the lieutenant worked carefully at squeegeeing the moisture from the side of his glass with a forefinger.

Finally, Charley looked up and spoke. "Maybe," he said pleasantly, "they commit murders differently in England."

"Yes," said the lieutenant, "they have rules." He turned to Annie. "Look, young lady. In twenty years on the force I have never had a single sundial in any case I've ever been on or ever heard about. And the earth keeps right on revolving in the same old way. The way murders really happen, a guy gets knocked in the head, stabbed with a knife, or shot with a gun. Once in a while, poisoned. Whoever did it beats it and we go out and look for him till we find him. That's all there is to it, nine times out of ten. Clues, yes. Hard to find, sometimes? Certainly. But no delicate subtle clues like sundials, and no split-second alibis. Believe me, murders are practically never committed and they are *never* solved the way you read about in detective stories." The lieutenant paused and took a long drink from his empty glass.

"Your glass," said Annie tenderly, "is empty." She stood up, gently disengaged his glass from the lieutenant's nerveless fingers, and left the room.

"Colhaus," said the lieutenant. "If —"

"No," said Charley, "Annie. But I think you've made a very strong impression."

"I would like to make an even stronger one. I would like to show her right now, with a personal demonstration, exactly what murder is like."

Annie returned with the lieutenant's drink, and curled up on the davenport again. "As I understand you, Lieutenant, any clue in a murder case less obvious than a bloodstained monkey wrench, with a full set of fingerprints, is hardly worth bothering about. Because —"

The lieutenant spoke, frowning and studying his glass. "This drink tastes funny," he said.

"Try some more," said Annie.

The lieutenant drank again. "Still tastes funny."

"I know," said Annie sweetly. "I put salt in it."

The lieutenant set his glass down, carefully. "Salt?" he asked, with deadly politeness. "Why?"

"To show you that if that salt," said Annie, "had been *tse-tsum*, you'd be dead right now! Within two seconds!"

"Look —"

"I'll get you some more," said Annie hastily.

"I don't *want* any more! Just what is this, anyway?"

"Well." Annie looked defensively from the lieutenant to Charley and back again. "You're both so smart that I just wanted to show you. There you'd be on the floor; dead. With *tse-tsum*, a rare jungle poison, analysis

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shows nothing but heart failure, so they couldn't prove a thing. Anyway, nobody'd suspect me because, as you just explained, murders are *never* committed this way."

"Yes?" said the lieutenant pleasantly. "And just where do you get this seesome? At your neighborhood druggist's?"

"You could get it," said Annie aloofly.

The lieutenant took a deep breath. He continued to inhale, through flared nostrils, as though he were planning to inflate a large balloon. His face changed from a rosy pink to a very attractive shade of orange, the color of a desert sunset. Then the telephone rang.

Annie walked, hastily, out to the hall and answered it.

"Annie's round," said Charley pleasantly, "on points."

"For you, Lieutenant," Annie called sweetly, and the lieutenant, exhaling as he went, came out and picked up the phone, while Annie tiptoed softly back to the davenport.

"Yeah," they heard him say, then silence. "Right away. Send a car. You got the address? Right," he said, then hung up and returned to the room. "Murder," he said softly, "*real* murder. You have never seen a murder, have you? Committed, not with seesome, but by blowing a guy's head off with a gun?"

"No," said Annie.

"Get your hat," said the lieutenant grimly, "and we'll drop in on a fresh, warm, and very real killing." He turned suddenly and looked at Charley, his eyes narrowing. "Say, if I thought you planned on something like this —"

"Absurd," said Charley. "Such a plan would be far too subtle for a flatfoot like me."

The room in which the dead man lay was a hotel room, not cheap or small, but drab and sad under the mean light of the chandelier on its ceiling. It had one window, shiny black against the night, and was furnished with a dark rug, a bed, a desk, a chair, a bureau, a floor lamp.

But Charley, Annie, and the lieutenant, standing in the doorway, saw none of these things. They saw only the man on his back on the floor, legs out straight, feet apart. One arm lay over his chest, limply, the other stretched out on the floor, away from the body, palm upward. There was no hair above his eyes; there was no head. The lieutenant gently pushed Annie into the room and closed the door behind them.

Four men, two kneeling at the dead man's side, the others rifling the drawers of the bureau, looked up, nodded at Charley and the lieutenant, glanced curiously at Annie, and resumed their work.

Charley turned to Annie who was still staring, eyes big, at the man on the floor. She was, Charley thought, remarkably pretty for a girl with a green complexion.

"Look," he said softly, "maybe it wasn't so smart bringing you here. I'll

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take you downstairs and you can —"

Annie turned haughtily. "I am quite all right," she said, apparently using someone else's voice. She stepped bravely closer to the dead man and, frowning a little, stared at his face with her eyes closed.

Charley stooped down, hands on knees, beside the medical examiner who was squatting at the dead man's side. "Identify him?" he said.

"Yeah. Lou knows him. Small-time racketeer: black market in the war, marijuana, loft robberies."

Charley stood up and joined Annie who was standing in a far corner of the room. Her face was now a comparatively healthy white. "Look, honey," he said gently, "the difference between a real murder investigation and the kind you read —"

Annie interrupted. She seemed excited. "The killer," she whispered, "is redheaded."

Charley looked at her for a moment. "Yeah?" he said.

Annie opened her bag and brought out a notebook. "Look at his fingernails."

Charley looked. In the harsh light from the overhead chandelier he could see, caught in the nails of the dead man's outflung hand, a little fringe of short dark-red hairs. *Red hair*, Annie wrote in her notebook.

Charley walked back to the medical examiner who was talking to the lieutenant. "That hair under his nails," he asked, "from the rug, isn't it?"

"Of course."

The lieutenant glanced curiously at Charley. "Annie?"

"Yeah."

The lieutenant stood up. "This is almost too easy."

"Wait." Charley remained motionless for a moment, thinking. "Maybe this is the way. I was simply going to explain our procedure, but she wants to be smart; let her have her head. Let's give her all the rope she needs."

The door of the room opened and the policeman on guard outside leaned in, a hand on the doorknob. A small worried man stepped past him into the room.

"Who are you?" said the lieutenant.

"Mr. Whiteman — Theodore Whiteman, the manager."

"Okay; wait."

Annie caught Charley's eye and Charley crossed the room, the lieutenant joining him. She whispered, "See the mud on his shoes?"

"Yes," said the lieutenant. "So what?"

Annie looked at him contemptuously and produced her notebook. "There is only one place in the entire New York area where you will find soil of that peculiar red color. South Street" — she began writing in her notebook — "around the dock area at South Street."

"Very interesting," said the lieutenant gravely. "You'd say, then, that he's been in South Street lately? Maybe the murderer hangs out there, too."

"Very likely. And the murder was committed at seven fourteen."

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The lieutenant's mouth opened suddenly, then closed again slowly. "You don't say," he said. "How —"

"His watch, of course. It stopped when he was killed."

The lieutenant nodded at Annie approvingly. "Good girl," he said. "Keep it up; keep your eyes open." He nodded at Charley and they walked toward the desk where one of the detectives was standing.

"What about that mud?" said Charley.

"Offhand," said the lieutenant, "I could name you fifty places around town where you'll find red soil."

The detective at the desk looked up.

"How come the guy's watch stopped, Eddie?" said Charley.

The detective shrugged. "Wasn't wound. I tried it."

The lieutenant smiled happily at Charley. "Hello, Hercule," he said. He turned to the hotel manager. "Anyone come up here before?"

The manager shook his head. "Not that I know of. Or any of the help; I checked."

"Anyone call?"

"A man — about an hour ago."

"What'd he say?"

"He said, 'Eight-oh-nine in?' And I said, 'Just came in.' And he hung up. Didn't even say thanks."

The lieutenant nodded as though this were what he'd expected. "You know the voice?"

"Never heard it before."

The lieutenant indicated the dead man. "You know this guy?"

"Yessir."

"How come?"

"He's stopped here before."

"Know anything about him?"

"Just that."

"You talk to him today?"

The manager nodded. "On the phone."

"When?"

"Seven thirty."

"What about?"

"He owed a phone bill from last time he was here. I asked him to pay."

"What'd you say?"

"I said, 'This is the manager. Glad you're with us again. There is a small bill —' Then he interrupted."

"What'd he say?"

"He said, 'Okay, Theo, later.'"

"Theo?"

"It's what people call me. He knew me."

The lieutenant looked at the manager for a moment, then turned away. "Stick around," he said. He beckoned to one of the detectives who crossed the room.

"Lou? Charley?" the lieutenant said. "What do you think?"

Charley shrugged. "Routine," he said.

"A small-timer down and out, who just got his hands on some cash. All his clothes are new. Right, Lou?"

The other detective nodded.

"So he's in the chips again," Charley continued, "and moves in out of the rain. But there's no money here, now. Right, Lou?"

Lou nodded again.

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"So" — Charley shrugged once more — "somebody bumped him for the money. Maybe it was his money in the first place."

The lieutenant glanced at Lou inquiringly.

"Something like that," said Lou.

"Well, we'll pick him up, here or there, sooner or later," said the lieutenant. "Teletype out?"

"Half an hour ago."

"Okay." The lieutenant nodded, dismissing Lou, and turned to Charley. "We might as well go."

They crossed the room to Annie again. Her eyes were fever-bright. "You noticed, didn't you?" she whispered.

"Noticed?" said Charley.

"Oh, *Charley* — the hotel man! When he phoned, he wasn't talking to — the dead man. He *couldn't* have been. It was seven *thirty* and the man was killed at seven *fourteen!* Remember?"

Charley nodded dumbly.

"So he *must* have been talking to the *murderer*. The phone rang, and — the murderer answered it!"

"No," said the lieutenant.

"No?" said Annie challengingly. "Why?"

"Well —" The lieutenant hesitated. "He said, 'Theo.' He said, 'Okay, Theo, later.' Not likely he'd know the manager's name or use it if he did."

Annie thought for several moments, rubbing her front teeth nervously with a forefinger. "What a break!" she exclaimed. "Don't you see? The murderer lisped!"

Charley felt suddenly guilty. "Look, honey," he said contritely. He put an arm around her shoulder protectively. "Maybe I should tell you —"

"Oh, Charley!" she said. "Don't you *see?* Look. We know it was the murderer who answered the phone. We know he wouldn't have said, 'Theo.' So what *did* he say that sounded like it? He must have said, 'Okay, thee you later!' Which sounds almost exactly like, 'Okay, Theo, later!' The murderer lisped!"

Charley looked at Annie hopelessly, his face a mask of guilt and despair. He opened his mouth to speak, then closed it again. He had waited, he realized, too long. It was impossible now, to explain — if he ever hoped to speak to Annie again.

"What's more," said Annie, "he was six feet four inches tall and left-handed."

"Wonderful," said the lieutenant. "How —"

"Look at the phone," said Annie coldly. She pointed to the desk. The phone lay in its cradle, the mouthpiece at the right. "A right-handed person replaces the phone exactly opposite from that. As for his height —"

The lieutenant took Charley's arm and they crossed the room to the desk. "You use this phone?" said the lieutenant to the man at the desk.

The detective looked up. "Of course."

"You left-handed?"

The man glanced at the lieutenant curiously. "No. Why?"

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"How come you put the phone back like that?"

The detective looked at the phone, then back again. "I don't know," he said. "I always do."

They returned to Annie. "Marvelous," said the lieutenant. He put his arm around Annie's shoulder affectionately. "Amazing," he said. "Great little helpmate you'll be for Charley." He looked at Charley solemnly. "Let's get out of here," he said. "Annie's given us enough to work on; the rest will be strictly routine."

And it was. To Annie's outraged astonishment, during the next week, no manhunt took place; no cordon of police was thrown round the city. Even worse, no circular was issued containing Annie's beautifully worked-out dossier on the criminal. The police seemed completely uninterested in Annie's deductions.

Charley tried to explain. They had returned to Annie's apartment from a movie, *Sweet Murder*, *My Lovely*, and were sitting — several feet apart — on the davenport.

"In this kind of killing," Charley said patiently, "we *know* the kind of guy who did it. And that's all we need. Because we know he'll be picked up sooner or later, somewhere for something. In a gambling raid, or for petty larceny, jostling in a subway, whatever his racket is. And every possible suspect is always questioned; about this crime and any other we've got."

Annie found this explanation less than satisfactory. She sniffed; a sniff that was close to a snort. "It's like hunting for a needle in a haystack," she said, "blindfolded! And not even hunting! Just waiting till it jabs you!"

"So what? As long as you find the needle."

"But when you have a *description*," Annie wailed, "practically an exact description, and —"

Relations between Charley and Annie, some six days later when the killer was found, resembled in tenseness the high E string of an electric guitar connected by mistake to a power line. And the fact that he was caught precisely as Charley had predicted didn't help. The word came one evening at Annie's; Charley answered the phone. And when he returned, smiling for the first time in days, he could be pardoned, perhaps, for gloating a little.

"Grab your hat," he said, "we're going to headquarters! And I'll show you a killer caught by the cops without any help from Sam Spade, Nero Wolfe, Father Brown, or even Lord Peter Wimsey!"

They waited, at headquarters, seated on yellow-wood folding chairs, in a small, unadorned, white-plastered room. The lieutenant, more worried and sleepless-appearing than ever, sat staring at his feet. Annie looked coldly ahead, while Charley waited happily, both watching the closed door of the room.

The door opened. A man was urged forward by a policeman at his back. He stepped forward into the

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room, ducking his head as he passed through the doorway, then stood staring sullenly over their heads at the opposite wall. His clothes were unpressed and he wore a cap. He seemed about forty years old.

Annie brought out her notebook and ticked off an item with her pencil. "Six feet four," she said. "Right?"

The lieutenant did not look at Annie. "Four and a half," he said.

Annie leaned forward and whispered to the lieutenant. "His cap," she said. "Do you suppose —?"

The lieutenant spoke wearily. "Take off your cap."

The man raised his hand — his left hand — and Annie's pencil flicked once. He pulled off his cap. His hair was almost beautiful; thick and alive, deeply waved and red.

"Little darker than I thought," Annie murmured, and her pencil flicked once more. "Where was he found, Lieutenant?"

The lieutenant looked up again very, very wearily. "Where did they pick you up?" he said to the man.

The man looked at them all for a moment, then returned his gaze to the wall before him. "Thouth Thtreet," he said, and Annie's pencil flicked twice.

During the ten-minute cab ride back to Annie's apartment, neither she nor Charley spoke; Charley because he was unable to, and Annie out of compassion. But when they stood at the street door of Annie's building, the cab still waiting at the curb, a voice, not his, came out of Charley's throat. "Tell me, just tell me this. Did it occur to you, even once, that it *could* have been somebody else? Say, a baldheaded guy, five feet two, who spoke with maybe a stutter? Did it ever enter your head that your clues *could* have been wrong? That it *could* have been somebody else? Did it ever —?"

"No," Annie said, "of course not."

"But why?" Charley wailed. "*Why?* Will you please tell me WHY?"

Annie looked at him sadly, pityingly, and made the final effort of a person who knows it is doomed to failure. "The clues," she said gently, "couldn't be wrong." She opened the door. "They just *couldn't* because — Charley, don't you see? It wouldn't be *fair!*"

Charley and Annie are married, now. They are very happy and contented — because they are not married to each other. Charley's wife thinks he is wonderful, a bulwark of law and order, but then she always did admire policemen — from her earliest memories of riding pickaback on the broad shoulders of her father Patrolman Colhaus. And Annie's husband — he thinks she is marvelous. He is a writer, a tweed-jacketed, pipe-smoking author of detective stories. And Annie, he says, gives him most of his best ideas.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Harry Miner's "Corpus Delicti" is one of the seven "first stories" which were awarded special prizes in EQMM's Sixth Annual Contest. This tale of post-war Germany — or, as the author himself expressed it, of "the downfall of Berlin amid scenes of catastrophe" — projects a deep sense of realism; the background of the story is absolutely authentic — compellingly so — although the actual plot and the characters are naturally fictitious. The atmosphere of authenticity, however, is not imagined: it derives from the author's first-hand knowledge of the locale, the actual living conditions, and what might be called the causes and the effects.

During the war Harry Miner was a member of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), first as a civilian, then as a soldier, in Washington, London, and on the European continent. He was one of the first few hundred Americans who flew to Berlin immediately after the Potsdam Conference gave U. S. access to that city. There Mr. Miner took his discharge, but he brought over his family and remained with the Office of Military Government for Germany (U. S.) for more than three years, until, toward the end of the air-lift (Operation Vittles) most of the central OMGUS offices were shifted down into the Zone. Then he spent another year in Nuremberg, and finally returned to this country in 1949, after five years of uninterrupted overseas duty.

In Europe, when Harry Miner was one of a three-man OSS team, he had many poignant and at times shocking experiences. One day, another member of his three-man team — Henry Koerner, the artist — while clambering among the ruins of Berlin at his incessant sketching caused a brick-slide which uncovered two bodies. This was the "peg on which I hung my tale . . ."

CORPUS DELICTI

by HARRY MINER

I DON'T KNOW EXACTLY WHAT TITLE Otto Ackermann held, but he had obviously been born and bred a member of the Berlin office-holding clique. We picked him up at the Borough Bürgermeister's office one crisp early autumn morning, and he guided us to the circle of shattered statuary which used to be Belle-Alliance-Platz, where we climbed out of our jeep under the

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wreckage of the Hallesches Tor subway station.

We were in a landscape of topsy-turvy brick. The streets radiated outward from the Platz through rubble-heaps two stories high, from which protruded fragments of walls, twisted remnants of plumbing, and chimneys bearing tiers of broken porcelain stoves. Here and there a few ruined structures had been restored to habitability by expedients almost more desolate than the ruins. On one corner, in the immediate foreground, a row of hand-carts stood on a narrow track, and a crew of men and women were digging into the rubble, cleaning and stacking the good bricks, and tossing the rubbish onto the carts to be hauled away. The bank of their excavation looked like a quarry. In the past eight months this crew had cleared two whole blocks, in which the pavements lay clean and the cellars neat and vacant — two whole blocks, in a city larger than Chicago.

"Our *Bezirk* Kreuzberg is a poor borough, but it is doing its share," said Ackermann with pride and satisfaction.

Carlson nodded. He and I had been sent by the Office of Military Government, Berlin Sector, to see if we could find some way of helping the work along with the small means at our disposal. Tucking his threadbare chesterfield around his lanky figure, Ackermann led us to the top of the rubble-heap, from which we looked down upon the laborers.

"The one slight advantage of this method," he said, "is that we salvage many small articles which would be lost if we were using power machinery. Pans, kettles, boards and hinges, bathtubs and stoves — any number of useful things may be found, particularly where the ceilings have held up. Over there, for example . . ."

He pointed to where a couple of men were breaking into a vaulting of masonry. As the stone gave way, they suddenly recoiled, and one of them shouted, "*Toten hier!*" At the same time a sluggish, nauseating odor reached us, and Ackermann gave an exclamation of disgust.

"I have chosen a poor example," he muttered. "There are bodies in there. Would you care to look?"

"Hardly!" said Carlson.

"It is not pleasant," the German agreed, "but I shall have to do it; it is part of my duty. You will excuse me?"

He clambered down the pile and talked to the foreman, while we stood looking down at the workmen in front of the broken vault. One man threw down his shovel and began walking stubbornly away, and the foreman looked after him without saying anything. The odor became thick and stifling, like a fluid.

"They are sending for the police," reported Ackermann, rejoining us. "Meanwhile, I will not be able to do anything for perhaps thirty minutes. We might wait in that little bar over there."

"Anywhere but here!" muttered Carlson; and we crossed the square to

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a dingy restaurant-saloon on the banks of the Landwehr Canal.

Ackermann apologized for the *kräuter* beer, which had no alcohol but was preferable to the coffee-substitute which contained no coffee. From where we sat we could look over the canal, spanned here by a bridge which had once been imposing, to the square before the wreckage of the Peterskirche. On our side of the bridge two policemen, wearing the gray-green uniforms and the pharaonic green helmets of the *Schupo*, loitered under the pillars of the station, watching the thin trickle of pedestrians crossing the canal. There were women with bundles of firewood strapped to their backs; soldiers returning from prison camps, laden with barracks-bags; and, now and then, dusty families trudging steadily with bent shoulders, their possessions and their sick and their babies loaded onto one or two hand-carts which they had pulled all the way from Poland.

"Do you make any effort to identify the bodies you dig up?" asked Carlson.

"Oh, yes. We have a special police organization for identifying missing persons. We still have our old residence records, and when we find bodies at an address corresponding to the persons who were registered there, we consider that a satisfactory identification. Of course, when many are together, for example in a basement shelter . . ."

He shrugged and sipped his beer with dissatisfaction. Carlson dug a pack of cigarettes from his shirt-pocket and offered them.

"Ah!" said Ackermann, softly and graciously. "Thank you. Do you mind if I do not light it just now? I will enjoy it so much after my dinner. . . . Oh, you are very kind!" He brought forth a metal holder into which he screwed one of the cigarettes very shallowly, so that he could smoke it completely through. Then, taking out a little leather case, he carefully placed inside it the second cigarette which Carlson had pressed on him.

"Sometimes we meet a bit of drama, a little story, under these ruins," he resumed, puffing. "I remember once . . . You do not mind to talk about these things? It may help to occupy the time while we wait."

"Go ahead," said Carlson.

"Well," said Ackermann, "once they found two bodies in a cellar. It was just down the way from here, in the Gitschinerstrasse. In all such cases, you know, a representative of the Borough must be present to record the identification, and on this occasion I was the one to go.

"These two bodies had been rather miraculously preserved. They had literally been smoked, like hams, without being burned at all — not even the clothing was scorched. And there they were after being buried a year or more, a little brown and a little dried out, but just as recognizable as in life.

"One was buried rather deeply. He

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was a young fellow, but his uniform was the *Volkssturm*, and when we got a good look at him we could see that he was a cripple — one leg was shorter than the other. He lay against the wall near the bottom of a window-frame with his rifle beside him and a bayonet in his belt. Apparently he had been trying to escape through the window when the wall fell on him and killed him.

"The same wall had caught the other fellow by the legs. This one was a strong young chap of the *Waffen-SS — Division-SS 'Adolf-Hitler'* — with a new Gewehr-41 rifle and a Walther pistol in its holster. After his legs had been caught, he had obviously been trying to crawl out, when the opposite wall fell on him and finished him. There were three holes in his chest, and a pointed piece of metal rail was still lodged in one of the holes.

"Well, by the time I arrived, the police were impatient to remove the bodies to the morgue and get on with their work. It seemed obvious that these men were battle casualties, killed during the fighting for the city. But after I looked at them, I told the police to wait a while."

He paused for a deep drag on his cigarette and another sip of beer, and I filled in the pause by asking:

"Why, what was wrong?"

"Well," said Ackermann, "in the battle for Berlin, one seldom found the *SS* and the *Volkssturm* fighting together. Especially not in this part of the city. The *Volkssturm* were sacrificed in Karlshorst and along the banks of the Spree to cover the withdrawal of the *SS* for their last stand in the Zoo. So, when I saw these young men together, it occurred to me that they might have come to this spot for personal reasons, not for anything connected with the battle. In other words, they might both have lived in this neighborhood, and possibly some of the people around here could identify them. You see?"

"Shrewd thinking," I murmured. "Did it work?"

"Oh, I don't know that it was particularly shrewd," said Ackermann, with a shrug of pure pleasure, "but — yes, it worked. We found a number of people who had lived here all through the war-time, and several identified the young men at a glance. They were standing there talking about it when an old man came up — an old artist named Klohst, a very nice old man — and a woman said,

" 'You knew Ernst all his life, didn't you, *Opapa?*'

" 'Yes, indeed; and Max too.'

" 'Then you are the man I have been looking for,' I told him. 'There is something strange here. I wonder if you can explain it to me?'

"I took him down and told him to look at Max's body — that was the *SS* man.

" 'Do you see anything peculiar about that body?' I asked.

" 'Why, yes, many things,' he said. 'To be so preserved, it is —'

" 'No,' I told him. 'Look, Papa Klohst — there are three holes in the chest.'

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" 'Yes, I see.'

" 'But there is only one piece of metal — in one of the holes. How were the other two holes made?'

"He looked, and he could see that there was no natural explanation. All three holes were deep, open wounds, and I was willing to bet they had all been made by the same weapon — the pointed piece of metal rail.

" 'Now, come, Papa Klohst,' I told him, 'you can see that somebody stabbed this boy while he was caught under the bricks. Stabbed him three times, and the third time left the metal in the wound. . . . A soldier, who was fighting to save his city and his neighbors in their last hour! I want to find out who did that act, my friend.'

"He hesitated and looked shamefaced.

" 'How should I know who did it?' he said. 'I did not see it done.'

" 'But you suspect, you have some knowledge!' I told him. I was speaking to him very strictly. 'You know, for example, what he was doing in this cellar?'

" 'Yes,' he said, 'I do.'

" 'Then you must tell me.'

"He looked at me in a begging sort of way.

" 'Why, Herr Ackermann?' he asked. 'Isn't everything obvious? You have already found the man who did it — it was young Ernst there. And he has already paid — he died too in his uniform. Will you accuse a dead boy?'

" 'I can tell you that best after I've heard the story,' I told him, 'but I must judge for myself what I should do.'

" 'Come away from this crowd then,' he said. And he took me to his room — his studio, I should say. It was in an attic, and really a very decent little place — he kept it neat and airy and had made it rather pretty — and I sat on the bed and he sat on the stool by the window, where he had his taboret and easel, and he told me this romantic little tale."

Ackermann paused long enough to blow through his cigarette holder, removing the few ashes and the scrap of paper which were all that remained of his cigarette. Carlson held out his package again.

"Ah, not now, thank you. I am not a regular smoker any more, you know."

"Oh, take one. You always talk better when you're smoking."

"Well . . . all right. I will just wait a few moments before I light it, if you don't mind — my mouth has become rather dry."

He laid the cigarette on the brim of his narrow-brimmed Homburg hat and took a good pull at his beer glass, after which he drew out a handkerchief, unfolded it, wiped his mouth, carefully refolded it, and put it back into his pocket.

"Max and Ernst had grown up together in the Gitschinerstrasse," he resumed, "and with them had grown up two very pretty girls, Lilo and Eva. Lilo was small, fragile, and excitable; she loved dancing and crowds

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and hoped to go on the stage. Eva was large, dreamy, and romantic, and her dream was to go to the University and become a scholar of German literature.

"Max and Lilo were companions from childhood and probably became lovers at an early age. He had been a hero in the Hitler-Youth, had proved himself in the HJ-Patrol Service, and became an Aspirant in the *SS* as soon as he was eighteen. She was a leader in the girls' organization, the *Bund Deutscher Mädel*. Eva also was in the *BDM* for a time, but as she grew older, the many meetings and duties failed to attract her, and she dropped out. As for Ernst, not even the Hitler-Youth wanted a cripple, so he turned himself to studies and books, and in time he and Eva were drawn closely together by their common interest in poetry. They often visited old Klohst's studio, where they could look out of the windows over the roofs, watch him paint, and talk of art and of the German soul. He became very fond of them.

"In September of 1942, Max went to Nürnberg as a Candidate and received his certificate into the *SS*. When he came back wearing his uniform, his family and his friends had a celebration for him, and for the time he was almost as much a hero to Eva as he was to Lilo. But then he was sent away for training, going from one school or camp to another. He was in the Panzer troops and spent some time in the ordnance school at Dachau. Here he lived under the walls of the KZ — the concentration camp — and chummed with the Deathshead-*SS* men who ran it. Now and then he would come back to the Gitschinerstrasse on leave, and each time he was stronger, harder, and more admired.

"And Ernst? Not being fit for military service, he obtained a small job in the Propaganda Ministry, where Eva was also working. Looking out the window across the Wilhelmsplatz, they could see the cars and motorcycles dashing into the Chancellory; and when the Führer came out on his balcony to talk to the people, they could hear him without leaving their desks. After a certain number of speeches they began to feel that he was speaking directly to them — so well did they know his figure, gesture, and voice. One day Ernst went the round of all the recruiting offices, begging to be taken into any kind of service which would give him a uniform. And he was rejected in all. That night he wept, despising himself as a German; and Eva held him in her arms, and promised to love him.

"Just then, however, came the last leave for Max, the last celebration. He had finished his training; everyone knew he would go to the front, everyone knew it would be the terrible East-front in Russia. For some reason Lilo was not there — she was doing her work-service on the farms, something like that. And that night Eva stayed with Max. One does not know exactly how it came about, but it is not too hard to understand.

"After that, Eva loved Max, and it

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was impossible for her to carry out her promise to Ernst. She told Papa Klohst about it and asked him what she should do. He warned her that Max would ruin her happiness; but she said she asked nothing more of life than to devote herself to a hero. Old Klohst was very sad; he had always thought of his two gentle young friends together; and he advised Eva that at least she herself must not trifle with Ernst. Ernst was waiting for her, and the only solution was to tell him how her heart had changed exactly as it had happened. So, in time, that was what she did, as tenderly and poetically as she could.

"Ernst probably had half expected something of the sort; for to a German part of the greatness of the soul is the tragedy to which it is doomed — its inevitable conquest before the iron will of the shining Superman. Really, I think this is one of the roots of our national dilemma — our conviction that only tragedy is noble, that the happy ending is unworthy of our higher natures. It is a strange perversion of the classical tradition, forced upon us by our infallible professors; and its result is that while we weep most pitifully for the good, we reserve our enthusiasms for the bloody strong. *Tja!*"

Ackermann shrugged and spread his hands open upon the table in a gesture of resignation. It was very quiet in the little bar. Through the door we could see the morning sunlight lying gently on the brown water of the canal, the shabby people toiling across the square, and the *Schupos* sauntering under the rusty wreckage of the subway, frequently looking beyond us to where, we knew, the clean-up crew were slowly unburying their find.

"Then came the battle for the city," said Ackermann. "Until the last few weeks nobody had realized the end was so near. Our leaders had talked to us only of victory, of the plans of our Führer which naturally could not be revealed but which at the proper time would result in the annihilation of our enemies in the traps he was preparing for them. But suddenly the Russians were at our doorsteps, the crippled and the old were called out for the last defense, and the women and the children went into the cellars to wait for death.

"Ernst was called into the *Volkssturm*, and at last got a uniform — not a complete uniform, it is true, but nevertheless an official Army fatigue jacket, and a red armband with *Deutscher Volkssturm — Wehrmacht* lettered on it in black. And he was issued a rifle, and shown how to load and fire it, and given a plastic-handled bayonet to put on the end of it. Eva walked with him to the Görlitzer Station and kissed him when he boarded the train. She told Klohst it was the only kiss they had ever exchanged. . . .

"Well, gentlemen, perhaps you have heard something of the last days of Berlin. There is no describing it. And this is one of the sections where the battle raged most fiercely.

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"Eva had remained unafraid all through the bombings. When her time would come, it would come, she would say — and she would walk the streets after dark while the flak was falling and walls were crashing and the roar of the bombers and the guns was enough to drive most people to the shelters. But that was when she had only death to fear; now, it was the Russians. To Eva, the Russians represented a form of bestial terror more appalling than death. And when the cannon began firing straight and level down our streets and through our houses, she and Klohst took refuge in the same cellar.

"There were perhaps a couple of dozen people in there, and they stayed there for more than a week, the women weeping and praying, the young girls covering themselves with dirt to look unattractive. Outside, the cannon were an incessant thunder, and the small arms and the tanks clattered like a factory, until the battle noise became so constant they no longer heard it — they merely felt the choking smoke and the dust, and, in time, the thirst and hunger.

"Our soldiers did their best, of course; but Germany by then was dying, stricken by your blows in the West; this battle was her death spasm. The Russians broke into the subway tunnels and raced through to emerge all over the city. There were no more defense lines; the fighters entrenched along the riverbanks were cut off and useless. Eva in her terror wanted to run out of the cellar, and Klohst had to hold her back. She begged him to come with her, to dash over to Gleisdreieck and go through the subway to Potsdammer Platz, where the Führer was. They would never come so far, she cried; they would never cut through to the Führer! Suddenly they heard heavy steps on the cellar stairs, the iron door was flung open, and through a billowing cloud of smoke they saw Max, helmeted, rifle in hand, shouting for Lilo with madness in his hoarse voice.

"Eva flung herself upon him, crying: 'You're winning, you have them in a trap! Oh, tell me Max, when will you kill them all. . . .'

" 'How is the battle?' yelled Klohst.

" 'Lost!' Max roared, flinging Eva aside in a kind of drunken excitement. '*Lilo!*' He bellowed the name with spittle flying from his lips; he seized Klohst by the coat and shook him.

" 'Then what are you doing here, coward! You think I will give Lilo to a deserter?'

"Max's face was terrible; he raised his rifle, butt foremost; but Klohst did not flinch, and the soldier mastered himself.

" 'Our whole division is out there moving down the canal,' he said deliberately. 'We will seal off the subway at the Stadtmitte; then we will take our last stand at the Zoo. The Führer himself will command us! Tell me of Lilo, for I must go!'

" 'Have no fear,' said Klohst. 'Lilo was sent to safety in the Tyrol.'

" 'You are lying!' cried Max. 'Only children were evacuated.'

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" 'And pregnant women.'

" 'Ah!' cried Max, with a start. Then he laughed. 'So is it? Well, God be thanked, at least she will be taken by Americans, not by beasts!'

"And he turned and ran out of the cellar; and Eva, with a cry, dashed after him. A moment later there was a thunderous crash, the ground shook, they could hear the rattle of falling bricks. Klohst crawled through the dust up the stairs until he could peer out on the street. Planes, tanks, and artillery were pounding the banks of the canal; not even the Adolf-Hitler Division of the *Waffen-SS* could move through that storm; but that was off to the left. What Klohst saw in the street was Eva with her arms around Max's neck, and Max, after looking toward the hopeless fury on the canal, suddenly turning and seizing her to him. After a moment they broke apart, and Max took her hand and drew her across the street, where the lower part of a house was still standing. Klohst watched him smash the frame from a basement window with his rifle-butt and draw her down inside.

"Then the old man returned to the shelter, in no happy frame of mind. He doesn't know how long afterward it was when Ernst crept in and flung himself upon the floor in tears.

" 'Tell me of Eva. Is she safe?'

"Klohst shrugged. 'As safe as anyone can be,' he said. 'And you, Ernst — how have you come here?'

"Ernst struck the floor with his fist.

" 'They left us to be massacred — those heroes of the *SS!*' he whispered. 'What could we cripples of the *Volkssturm* do against tanks? They simply ran over us. I looked about and could not see a single comrade — even the Reds had passed beyond me. But I came through Treptower Park while they stormed Neukölln, and I met them again at the Warschauer Bridge. They are at my heels, *Opapa;* we have only a few minutes more. So now tell me the truth about Eva.'

" 'She was here for a time,' Klohst told him. 'She wanted to go through the tunnel to Potsdammer Platz, where she would be near the Führer.'

"Ernst bit his lip, and after a moment rose to his feet and picked up his rifle. 'I must find her,' he said, looking at the weapon. 'She would not want to fall into their hands.' And he limped into the streets.

"And according to Klohst, that was the last he saw of any of them until the two brown bodies were dug out of the ruins of that cellar into which Max had led Eva. . . ."

Ackermann stopped speaking; whirled the remains of his beer in his glass.

"Klohst's theory, you see, was that Ernst found Max and Eva making love in the cellar, that he stabbed Max while Eva fled, and then was himself killed while trying to get out of the building. It was an acceptable theory. A weak man, with the madness of battle in his brain, Ernst would be avenging a lifetime of suppressed envy.

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"I asked Herr Klohst to come to the Police headquarters with me and have his statement taken down in writing. While he was dictating it, I had a talk with the chief of Police.

" 'The story has certain weaknesses,' I told him.

" 'What weaknesses do you mean?' he asked.

" 'Well, for one thing, it is hard to believe that a cripple could overpower a man like Max.'

" 'That would depend on the circumstances,' he said. 'I think Herr Klohst has hinted at a set of circumstances which would explain it quite well.'

" 'Then, for another thing,' I said, 'why should Ernst stab him with a piece of metal rail, when he had a bayonet in his belt?'

" 'He was not accustomed to weapons. He seized the first thing that came to hand.'

" 'I see you are very ingenious, Herr Hauptmann,' I said to him. 'I wonder how will you explain the fact that Ernst was crushed and killed by the wall which *trapped only Max's legs*? You see, Max must have been alive and struggling *after* Ernst had been killed. Therefore, the hand that stabbed him could not have been Ernst's hand.'

"The Captain looked at me.

" 'You mean the girl?' he said.

" 'Why,' I told him, 'we have no reason to believe she hated Max. On the contrary. But there was one who loved her, and who thought that Max had ruined her life and Ernst's and had brought about their deaths. He had been watching — from just across the street. Even an old man might stab a soldier whose legs were pinned down.'

" 'I see,' said the Captain.

" 'Herr Klohst is here, if you want to talk to him,' I suggested.

'The Captain thought a while.

" 'Your deductions are clever,' he said at length, 'and very possibly correct; but you have forgotten one thing, Herr Ackermann. We are now living under a democracy, and in a democracy one must prove the guilt of the accused. In this case there are clearly no proofs. Take his story, Herr Ackermann, and let him go.' "

Ackermann eyed us with a smile.

"Well, he was right, of course. Very right, in my opinion. And Herr Klohst is living in the Gitschinerstrasse to this day; and if you would care to visit him, I am sure you will find him a most kindly and attractive old gentleman. He paints portraits for a living, very quickly and true to life; I do not believe he has had much custom among Americans, if you —"

"Some day, perhaps," said Carlson.

"As you wish, of course," said Ackermann.

"But what happened to the girl?" I asked.

"Why, no one can know for sure. One can only reconstruct the scene and try to imagine what happened. Ernst stumbled into the street to search for her; he saw movement or heard voices in the basement across the way; he looked through that

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window which Max had smashed not long before. And Klohst, creeping behind him to watch, saw Ernst discover Max and Eva together, saw his suffering and Eva's shame. . . . I think perhaps that is when Eva left. I think she ran away from that scene, ran to the subway, ran to her death."

"Why necessarily to her death?"

"You know what happened to that part of the subway, don't you?" he asked quietly. "About ten thousand people took refuge in the triangle of tunnels connecting Gleisdreieck, Potsdammer Platz, and the Anhalter Station. But the *SS* wanted to block those tunnels from the Russians. So, without giving any warning to those thousands of people, they sealed the tunnels — and flooded them."

He gave us a wry smile.

"We have most of the bodies out by now. It has taken us almost a year, but soon, I hope, the water of Berlin will be fit to drink again. They are without shape and quite impossible to identify. One of them, I think, was Eva."

He straightened up, and swallowed the rest of his beer.

"And that, gentlemen, is the end of my little story; and just in time, I see, for here is my report."

We looked around to see a man in a smart gray-and-black uniform, standing respectfully about three paces from our table. At Ackermann's summons he stepped forward.

"Four bodies — a mother and three children. No positive identification yet. Shall we —?"

Ackermann groaned. "Inquire among the neighbors, Herr Unterwachtmann — we must try to name them . . . poor creatures. It may take some time, gentlemen. Must you go back soon to your offices? It would be a pity not to finish our inspection, now that you have come out here. Yes? Good. Then perhaps another glass of this poor beer, while you wait?"

He called the proprietor and ordered for us. Then, picking up his hat in such a way that the cigarette on the brim was clamped under his thumb, he followed the policeman out the door; and as he passed the window, we saw him take out his little leather case and carefully place the cigarette inside. It was worth fifteen marks.

EDITORS' NOTE: *In one of Harry Miner's letters to us he made a statement which we cannot refrain from quoting. Mr. Miner said: "I think it would be very good, very sobering propaganda for Americans if they could see just one Russian tank column roaring through the streets of a great city, driven by proud Tartars looking as savage as the troops of Genghis Kahn, whose descendants they are." This from a man who has watched the events, not leading up to, but coming after the tragedy . . .*

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J. S. Fletcher awoke one morning to find himself famous. The day before, an inquisitive newspaperman had caught a glimpse of President Woodrow Wilson propped up in bed, reading a book. Naturally, the reporter wanted to know what book the President of the United States was reading. It proved to be J. S. Fletcher's THE MIDDLE TEMPLE MURDER, *and when the news spread over the land, with columns in the big city papers and paragraphs in the hinterland papers, Mr. Fletcher's name became a household word. The sales of his books — such is America — immediately rocketed to the bestseller class; his home in Surrey, England — such is Britain — was suddenly the Mecca of tourists and journalists. But J. S. Fletcher remained calm and aloof; he continued his studies in theology, and he continued to write. He worked three hours every day before lunch, writing rapidly with a steel-nibbed pen; his handwriting was neat and precise, and he rarely made a single correction, even in a novel-length manuscript. And when he died in 1935, one week short of being 72 years of age, he had written no less than 250 books — an amazing record . . .*

BICKMORE DEALS WITH THE DUCHESS

by J. S. FLETCHER

WHEN Bickmore, who dealt in antique furniture, old pictures, and the like at a gloomy old shop in the High Market at Norcaster, set out one morning to attend the sale by auction of the effects of a resident of the town who had recently died, he had no idea that any romance or sensational development would result from whatever he might do that day. Neither was foreign to his trade; in his time he had known both. More than once romance had sprung from his acquisition of some ancient cabinet; now and then the clue to a crime had been found in a bit of furniture casually purchased and set aside to be examined at leisure; on one occasion a missing will had been discovered hidden away in a frowsy old book which Bickmore had bought for five shillings and would cheerfully have sold for twenty. But these events and developments were rare; they were accidents, like the sudden and unexpected turnings-up of a perfect and complete and undoubtedly genuine set of Chippendale chairs in a house where you would never have thought to find such a thing, or the discovery of an unquestionable Gainsborough or a gem of a Reynolds in the garret of a countryman's cottage. And nobody expects accidents, and Bick-

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more expected nothing more that morning than that he was going to buy two or three or four lots of the old stuff which Mr. Septimus Walkinshaw had left on departing this life.

The late Mr. Walkinshaw, in his time, had been a well-to-do chartered accountant in the town, a man of considerable means. But he was also known as an antiquary, and as an occasional collector who knew good things when he saw them. Bickmore, who had once or twice visited the old gentleman's quiet house in the Friaries, knew that several articles of ancient furniture were now to be offered for sale by auction which were specially worth buying. In the preliminary stages of the proceedings he bought two or three such things, but he was never really interested until there was put up an old bureau of great age at which he himself had seen its late owner writing. It was a beautiful bit of work, in excellent preservation: oddly enough, there was no great competition for it, and Bickmore acquired it for fifty guineas, and later in the day had it transferred to his warehouse with his other purchases. For the rest of that afternoon and evening, however, being otherwise busied, he gave no more thought to it. And he was not even thinking about it next morning when, soon after Norcaster had awakened to another day's business, into his shop came bustling the auctioneer under whose hammer the bureau had fallen, and who now carried in his hand the buff envelope of a telegram.

"Morning, Bickmore!" said the auctioneer, who was on familiar terms with every tradesman in the town. "Fine morning! Look here! — this came while I was at breakfast. Here — read it for yourself. It concerns you more than me — as it's a day too late."

Bickmore, who was a man of few words, took the telegram and read:

To Strymer, Auctioneer, Norcaster, England.

Just heard of Walkinshaw's sale. Buy in for me old bureau that stood in his library. Go to any price.

From Duchess of Norcaster, Hotel de Paris, Monte Carlo.

"Of course you'll sell," remarked Strymer, as Bickmore silently handed back the flimsy scrap of paper. "I expect the Duchess saw the advertisement of old Walkinshaw's sale in the *Times*, and made a mistake in the actual date. Anyway, I didn't get that until this morning — too late for me to act for her. However, if you'll say what you want, I'll wire at once to her Grace. Fifty guineas you gave, eh, Bickmore? Well? What's your price for your bargain?"

But Bickmore was rubbing his chin.

"Um!" he answered after a long pause, during which Strymer began to look at him wonderingly. "Afraid I can't say, Mr. Strymer, just now. You see — the fact is, I've a customer in view."

"Oh, come!" expostulated the auctioneer. "Her Grace, now! You can't refuse her! And look at your

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chance! See what she says: 'Go to any price.' Come now! — name your figure. I don't want to disappoint her Grace."

But Bickmore shook his head.

"No," he said, "not at present, anyway. The — the other party has an option on it. I can't do anything this morning, Mr. Strymer."

"Come — come!" urged Strymer. "Look here! — say a hundred and fifty! She'll go to that. And that's a hundred clear profit!"

"No," replied Bickmore. "Sorry, but I can't do it."

Strymer tried five minutes' more coaxing, but it was useless. At the end of his fruitless endeavor he went away, grumbling, and Bickmore rubbed his chin still more as he watched him go. And then Bickmore asked himself a question in plain words: Why did the Duchess of Norcaster, who was certainly not a collector, and didn't know a bit of Sheraton from the product of a local cabinet-maker, want Walkinshaw's bureau? — want it so much that she was willing to pay just about any price for it? Why?

The more Bickmore put this question to himself, the more he failed to find any likely answer to it. He knew the Duchess — everybody knew her — as wife of one of the great local magnates. She was still on the right side of forty; she was good-looking; she was popular. She came of an old sporting family, and if she was not on the racecourse, or a puppy-walking show, or at something else connected with dogs or horses, she was at Deauville or at Monte Carlo — as in the present instance — or, if at home, at the bridge-table. Sport, cards, games of chance — that was the Duchess. And she was wanting to buy Walkinshaw's bureau at any price! — she, whose natural tastes would much more likely have run to something brand-new and conspicuously vulgar out of Tottenham Court Road or Kensington. If she had been some relation of old Walkinshaw's, now, and was cherishing a sentimental affection for a piece of furniture regularly associated with him, there might have been something in it, said Bickmore; but she wasn't; Bickmore, though ignorant of Debrett or Burke, was not unacquainted with the Duchess's pedigree. She came of a race of hard-living, hard-riding, hard-drinking country squires, and she had been a bit of a hoyden before the Duke married her and transformed her into a Duchess. But then, reflected Bickmore, everybody in the neighborhood knew that the Duke was about as big an ass as they made 'em, and that his spouse did pretty much as she liked. And after all, the present question was — Why did she want that bureau at any price?

When Bickmore had eaten his midday dinner that day, he went back to his place of business and locked himself in the room in which the Walkinshaw bureau had been temporarily stored. He spent a few minutes in looking at it, very thought-

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fully; a few more in walking around it and inspecting it from every possible point of view. This over, he began to tap and prod it, as if it had been a prize ox at a cattle show and he was estimating its condition and solidity. And eventually, having unlocked it, he began to examine it within, inch by inch. There was nothing unusual in its appearance, interiorly, but Bickmore was not the man to be deceived by appearances. When he had let down the flap which served as a writing-desk and saw the usual neat little pigeonholes, compartments, and miniature drawers all finished with the exquisite perfection of detail peculiar to the old furniture makers, he only saw what he had expected to see. And he did not trouble to open the larger drawers beneath the flap — three of them; good, roomy drawers: Bickmore's concern was with the smaller apparatus at the top. For he had a conviction which had first arisen in his mind when Strymer handed him the Duchess's telegram and had grown stronger ever since — the conviction that somewhere in old Walkinshaw's bureau there was a secret receptacle, and in it was deposited something which the Duchess of Norcaster was extremely anxious to recover.

It took Bickmore, for all his knowledge of old furniture and the ways of its ingenious makers, the better part of an hour to find what he felt certain, all along, was there. But in the end, after a vast amount of measuring with a pocket foot-rule, and reckoning up measurements with a bit of pencil and scrap of paper, he came suddenly on what he wanted — a small secret drawer, most cunningly contrived. The cleverness of its contrivance was all the more remarkable because, once you knew the secret, it was as easy to bring that drawer to light as it was to open any of the other drawers and compartments about which there was no secret. But there it was, a small, coffin-shaped receptacle, about a quarter the dimensions of a cigar box. And in it lay an oblong parcel, done up in soft tissue paper, and carelessly tied about with a bit of ordinary string, ending in a double knot.

It was characteristic of Bickmore that instead of cutting the string with his penknife he carefully and slowly untied the double knot which secured it; characteristic, too, that he laid the string aside with as much care as if it had been gold cord. It was with similar care that he took off the tissue paper — to reveal an inner wrapping of soft white leather. When that had been unrolled, Bickmore found himself staring at a magnificent diamond necklace — and at a folded half-sheet of notepaper, the only other contents of the mysterious parcel, and the only other contents of the secret drawer.

Bickmore gave his first attention to the half-sheet of notepaper. When he had unfolded it, he saw that a couple of lines of writing ran across it — the stiff, crabbed writing of old Walkinshaw, every letter perfectly

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formed, every t crossed, and every i dotted. This is what he read:

Received from Mr. Septimus Walkinshaw as a loan the sum of five thousand pounds.

Mirabelle Norcaster

Bickmore began to understand things. The Duchess of Norcaster had borrowed five thousand pounds from Mr. Walkinshaw and had deposited with him as security a diamond necklace. But what interested Bickmore was a question which immediately sprang into his mind — Was this *the* necklace which formed a part of the famous Norcaster Diamonds? Everybody had heard of the Norcaster Diamonds — they were an heirloom in the family, going with title and estate. And of course there was local tradition about them; it was commonly believed that they were kept in a sealed box in the strong room of some London bank, and were never taken out except to be worn by the Duchess of the time being at some unusually great event — a Coronation, or a State banquet or ball, or coming-of-age festivity, or ducal reception of Royalty, or something equally grand. From an inspection of the stones and their setting, Bickmore was certain that this was *the* necklace. And it was very evident that the Duchess had raised five thousand pounds on it from Mr. Walkinshaw, and had seen him place it and her receipt for his money in that secret drawer — good reason why she wanted to buy the bureau! In fact, Bickmore now believed that he saw through the whole thing. The transaction had been an absolutely secret one, between Walkinshaw and the Duchess. Soon after it had taken place, Walkinshaw had died, very suddenly; the sale of his effects had soon followed; the Duchess wanted to get hold of the bureau in order that she might repossess herself of her diamonds without repaying the loan to Walkinshaw's residuary legatee. And who was *he?* Bickmore did not know; that was a detail . . . the thing to be done at present was . . .

What Bickmore did was to wrap up the parcel again, replace it in the secret drawer, and have the bureau transferred to a private room, the key of which he put in his pocket. That done he asked himself a question — How soon should he see the Duchess?

Bickmore knew the Duchess would come. She was sure to come. He felt positive that if Strymer had telegraphed to her that he had been unable to secure the bureau, as he probably had, she would hurry home from Monte Carlo as fast as she could travel. Oh, yes, she would be walking into his shop before many days were over — as sure as his name was Daniel Bickmore. Very good! — but before he was honored with her Grace's visit, Bickmore was going to know a thing or two.

But before Bickmore progressed far in his pursuit of knowledge, Strymer appeared again — next day. Once more he carried a telegram in

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his hand. And in his eye there was the expression of a man who feels that though he has been repulsed once, he will certainly not be baffled twice.

"Hullo, Bickmore!" he exclaimed, unceremoniously. "That bureau, now. Here's another wire from the Duchess. Of course, I wired to her yesterday, after seeing you, and told her that her first telegram had come too late for me to execute her commission, and that you'd bought that particular bit of stuff at Walkinshaw's sale. Here's her reply."

Bickmore, with no show of interest, took the paper which Strymer shoved into his hand, and read what was written thereon.

See Bickmore at once. Give any price he likes. Must have bureau.

"Of course you'll sell, after that?" said Strymer. "Come now! — what's the figure?"

Bickmore handed back the telegram and turned to what he had been doing when the auctioneer came in.

"Can't name any figure, Mr. Strymer," he replied calmly. "I told you yesterday — somebody else has an option on it."

"Just so! — but can't you get rid of him, or her, or whoever it is?" persisted Strymer. "I reckon you'll not get out of him or her what you'll get out of the Duchess! See what she says? — 'Give any price he likes'! Look here, now! — name your price, and I'll go so far as to settle here and now! Can't say fairer than that, Bickmore, can I? Come!"

"No," answered Bickmore. "Business is business. I'm not in a position to treat. All I've got to say is — if, when the Duchess comes home, I still have the bureau to sell, she shall have the first refusal. Can't do more."

Strymer looked at him wonderingly.

"Hanged if I understand this!" he exclaimed. "What is there that's particularly fetching about the thing? Nice bit of old stuff, to be sure — but I've had far nicer through my hands. Fifty guineas didn't you give, eh? And you mean to tell me that whoever it is that's got an option on the bureau will give you so much that you think it worth while to refuse my offer on her Grace's behalf? Cash down, Bickmore! Write you a check this minute — if we agree on a price."

"Can't do it," said Bickmore. "Said all I've got to say."

Bickmore's first step was to go across to the post office and despatch a telegram. That telegram was to a man whom he knew in London — a man who had extensive dealings in precious stones, and was of great repute as an expert. Bickmore had had business transactions with him on various occasions, and knew that he could trust him. And when, in response to the telegram, the man turned up in Norcaster that evening, Bickmore took him home to his private house, gave him a good dinner, and later, when they were alone with their cigars and their glasses, suddenly produced the diamond necklace from his pocket, and handing it to his guest

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asked him laconically what he thought of it.

The expert let the necklace slide through his fingers — lovingly. He made a soft, purring sound as if he had been caressing something for which he had a sentimental affection. But suddenly he rose smartly from his chair, crossed over to a point immediately beneath an electric light, and looked closer, and still closer. And with equal suddenness he turned on his host, and taking his cigar from his lips with one hand, waved the necklace at him with the other, and snapped out a single word:

"*Paste!*"

Bickmore's face remained as immovable as that of a marble bust which looked down on him and his guest from a bracket in the corner. He nodded over the rim of his glass, which he was just then raising to his lips.

"Paste, eh?" he remarked, indifferently. "You're certain?"

The guest, who was a bluff and hearty sort of person, laughed, threw the necklace on the table, and picking up his own glass took a long pull at its contents.

"As ever they make 'em, my boy!" he answered. "Stake my professional reputation on it — oh, yes — paste! Bee-u-tiful work, my boy — I've a pretty good idea whose work, too!"

"Whose, then?" demanded Bickmore.

"Parisian, my boy — excellent work done there in the imitation-gem line. I should say, if I were asked, as you ask me, my boy, it was done by Legros and Folquet — I've seen a lot of work of theirs. Of course it's a very fine, beautiful, perfectly executed replica of some famous necklace — I daresay I could trace that necklace, if necessary. But — a replica! Not an original. Not diamonds. No, my boy — paste!"

"What's a thing like that worth — as paste?" inquired Bickmore.

The expert rubbed his plump hands together, and drew inspiration from his big cigar.

"Well, my boy, it depends. It's the workmanship, d'ye see? The stuff — pooh! And the setting — not much. It's the imitating of the real thing — the exquisite artistry of the workmanship, my boy! And that's a lovely bit of work — oh, lovely! A few hundred pounds, my boy, at least."

"And the original?" suggested Bickmore. "What about its worth?"

The expert's round face grew grave. He waved his cigar.

"Ah, my boy!" he said. "Now you ask me a very serious question — a question of the first magnitude! You mean, my boy, that supposing that little toy was made of real diamonds it would be worth — so much?"

"That's just about it," assented Bickmore. "What would the original — diamonds the size and so on of those things — be worth?"

"There's other things than size, my boy," said the expert solemnly. "There's all sorts of things to be taken

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into consideration in estimating the value of diamonds. But I should say, my boy, that the original of that replica, if the stones are of the first quality, is worth nearer forty than thirty thousand! You might say thirty-five thousand of the best, my boy."

"Very nice figure," observed Bickmore, dryly. "And you haven't the slightest hesitation in saying that this is — paste?"

"Oh, not the slightest, my boy!" affirmed the expert.

"Then oblige me by sitting down at that desk and writing out a certificate to that effect," said Bickmore. "I will need it."

Next morning Bickmore replaced the necklace in the secret drawer of the bureau, but the little parcel of soft leather and tissue paper in which it was enclosed now contained another document in addition to the receipt — the expert's certificate. That done, Bickmore locked up the bureau and the room in which he had stored it. This, he was well aware, was the waiting stage. And he was the sort of man who could wait patiently.

But one day he knew that he would not have to wait long. Turning over the morning papers at his club, his eye caught the Duchess of Norcaster's name. Her Grace had just returned from the Riviera to her town house in London. Bickmore smiled — and from that moment began to expect the Duchess at any instant. Many instants went by, however, and many hours, and many days and still no Duchess appeared. Bickmore kept his ears open at that centre of local gossip, the club; it would soon be known there if the Duchess came down to the ducal seat just outside the town. But he heard nothing of her arrival there. Yet one item of interest he did hear, and that was that her Grace had fallen upon great good luck at the tables at Monte Carlo. That made Bickmore all the more certain that she would come to see him — and with a full purse.

Instead of the Duchess, there walked, one afternoon, into his shop an elegantly-attired, handsome, middle-aged lady who, when Bickmore first became aware of her distinguished presence, was calmly surveying the various contents of the establishment through a gold-mounted lorgnette. She deigned to see Bickmore at last, and surveyed him from top to toe as if he had been a five-foot cupboard.

"Oh — ah — you are Mr. Bickmore, I suppose?" she suggested, in a condescending, high-pitched voice.

"At your service, ma'am," assented Bickmore, with his best bow.

"Just so! I — ah — I am thinking of taking a house near the town, and I should like to look round your stock, don't you know, with the idea of seeing if you have anything — anything particularly good, you know — that would attract me," said the lady. "So much more convenient, you see, if one can find a few things close at hand, don't you know? I hear you sometimes have some exception-

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ally good pieces of old furniture?"

"Somewhat noted for that, ma'am," replied Bickmore. "I have at times some of the finest old work that you could get anywhere in England, but it's very soon picked up. If you will allow me to show you round . . ."

The visitor was only too willing to be shown round, and Bickmore proceeded to act as guide to his collection. But he was suddenly much more interested in his caller as a personality than as a possible customer. Taking a closer inspection of her as she stood examining certain vases, Bickmore knew that he had seen her before. And just as suddenly he remembered where. About a year previously there had been a great open-air fête in the Duke of Norcaster's park, and Bickmore, in company with several hundreds of his fellow-townsmen and their wives, had attended it. There had been a large house party at the Duke's at the time, and its members had moved freely about the grounds. Bickmore now remembered that he had seen this morning's caller strolling around with the Duchess. And having settled that point, he lost all interest in her as a customer, and began to watch her as something else — a spy.

But Bickmore was careful to keep playing his own part. He took his visitor from room to room, showing her things that were of note and value; finally, well knowing what he was doing, he unlocked the door of the room in which he had stored the Walkinshaw bureau, and ushered her in with the remark that there were a few choice articles there which were well worth inspection. Watching his companion narrowly, he saw that she spotted the bureau as soon as she crossed the threshold; he knew, too, that she would not draw his attention to it until she had affected to inspect the other things. When at last she came to the corner in which it stood, she pretended to pass it by as an object of no particular interest; then paused.

"Rather a quaint old thing!" she remarked patronizingly. "Nothing very exceptional about it, though, is there?"

"An excellent example of its period, ma'am," replied Bickmore, "and in splendid preservation. It belonged to the late Mr. Walkinshaw of this town, who was a collector of repute."

The lady showed more interest.

"Dear me!" she said. "What is it like — inside?"

Bickmore produced a key from his pocket, and unlocked and let down the flap. And keeping his watchful eye on his companion he saw hers go straight to a certain part of the top half of the revealed interior — where, as Bickmore well knew, there was a spring that released the secret drawer. But he showed no trace of having seen — instead, he began to expatiate on the beauties of the bureau. Suddenly, his visitor dropped into a chair, close by.

"I — oh, dear me!" she gasped. "I feel — faint! Can — can you get me a glass of water?"

It was a long way from that up-

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stairs room to the regions below, where drinking water was likely to be kept. But Bickmore laughed inwardly at being able to checkmate this very obvious move. The room in which they stood was one that he used as a sort of private office, and there was a corner cupboard in it from which he immediately produced a carafe of water and a glass. And as he crossed the floor with them he spoke, and unless his pretended customer was unusually obtuse she must have noted a slight touch of sarcasm in his tone.

"I have both brandy and whisky here, ma'am," said Bickmore. "And soda water. If you would prefer ——?"

"Oh, no, thank you!" exclaimed the lady.

She took the glass and sipped a little of the water, murmuring something about a weak heart, always affected by climbing stairs; presently she made a quick recovery, and setting down the glass, smiled on Bickmore for the first time since she had entered the establishment. It was one of those smiles which are best described by the word wheedling.

"And how much do you want for this old bureau, Mr. Bickmore?" she asked in dulcet tones. "Do you know, I've taken quite a fancy to it."

"That bureau, ma'am, is not for sale," he replied, quietly. "Another person has an option on it."

That evening, looking in at the club for an hour or two, Bickmore ran into Strymer. Strymer made a face at him.

"Well?" inquired Bickmore. "And what have I done?"

"Got me a very hot quarter of an hour this morning!" answered Strymer. "That's what you've done! The Duchess turned up at my office, just before noon — she's come down here for a few days. Wanted to know what the so-and-so I meant by not carrying out her commission. Of course, I threw all the blame on you!"

"Very kind of you, I'm sure," replied Bickmore. "I daresay I can stand it. But I should think it would have been much more pertinent if the Duchess had told you why she was so anxious to get hold of that particular piece of furniture."

"She did!" exclaimed Strymer. "She says it was once in her family. Belonged to her grandfather, on the maternal side — old Squire Camp — ages ago."

"Who told her that?"

"Old Walkinshaw, she says. Had to see him on some charitable business or other, not long before she went off to the Riviera, and he pointed out this bureau to her, and told her its history. What's more, she says that old Walkinshaw promised to leave the bureau to her when he died. See?"

"Well, he didn't."

"Of course he didn't!" agreed Strymer. "May have meant to, though. But he popped off on the sudden. By the way, heard about his will?"

"Not a word," replied Bickmore. "Interesting?"

Strymer rubbed his hands.

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"Left everything he had to the town!" he answered joyously. "A lot of it to the established charities, some to create new trusts, a certain amount for improvements, and that sort of thing. Very sporting of the old chap. But then, of course, he'd neither kith nor kin, as they say, and he'd certainly made his money here. Yes, that's it — all to the town. Postlethwaite, in Market Street, is sole executor, but they say he's little to do except to hand over the money to the Mayor and Corporation as trustees."

"Oh!" remarked Bickmore.

Strymer tapped the side of his nose and went to play bridge, and Bickmore turned into the reading room and looked at the newspapers.

"She'll come herself tomorrow!" he muttered. "Dead certain!"

And at eleven o'clock next morning the Duchess came.

The Duchess came openly, in her smartest car. Bickmore, catching sight of its grandeur, resolved to play his part like a man, and hurried to his door; the Duchess, handsome and debonaire, smiled broadly at him.

"Well, Mr. Bickmore!" she said, jollily, "I've come to see you about that old bureau. Lot of bother you've given me, too! Or it's given me! —"

"The latter supposition is more correct, your Grace," replied Bickmore. "I should be sorry to give your Grace any trouble."

"Oh, well, I suppose it was my own fault for mistaking the date of Mr. Walkinshaw's sale," said the Duchess graciously. "I always did get hopelessly mixed about dates, and when one's far away from home, you know, eh? Of course, if Mr. Strymer had got my telegram in time, there'd have been no bother at all — he'd have bought the thing in for me. But now look here, Mr. Bickmore, what's this Mr. Strymer tells me? — that somebody has an option on the bureau?"

"The option has not been taken up," replied Bickmore.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" she exclaimed. "That's lucky — for me, isn't it? Then of course you'll sell it to me?"

"Perhaps your Grace would like to see the bureau?" suggested Bickmore.

He led the Duchess through the shop and up various flights of stairs to the room in which the much-desired piece of furniture was housed. Once inside, with the door closed, he waved his hand towards the corner by his desk.

"Your Grace recognizes it?"

The Duchess smiled at the bureau as a mother might have smiled on a long-lost and just-recovered child.

"Oh, of course!" she exclaimed. "Delightful old thing, isn't it? Used to belong to my grandfather, you know. And Mr. Walkinshaw promised to leave it to me."

"But he didn't."

"Well, the poor man died so suddenly," said the Duchess. "Otherwise — but come now, Mr. Bickmore, I'm so pleased that the other person didn't take up his option! Now, how much?"

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"Your Grace is extremely anxious to secure possession," said Bickmore, with a look at the Duchess which made her start, and glance with sudden attention at him. "But I am in possession — and sometimes I buy things which I don't care to part with. I, too, am a bit of a collector. And collectors, your Grace, have their — eccentricities. Fads, you know. Now — why, frankly, is your Grace so very desirous of buying this bureau?"

The Duchess gave Bickmore another look. It expressed a good deal — and it suddenly became transformed into an expression of ingenuous candor that would have suited a stage milkmaid.

"Mr. Bickmore!" she exclaimed. "I'll tell you! Between ourselves! There's something in that bureau that belongs to me!"

"Yes," said Bickmore, quietly. "There is also something that belongs to — somebody else!"

"To — somebody else? To — whom?" she inquired anxiously.

"To the late Mr. Walkinshaw's executor," said Bickmore. "Listen, your Grace. Suppose I tell you what is in that bureau. There is a secret drawer, and in the secret drawer there is a small parcel, done up in tissue paper and soft leather. Within it is what looks like a diamond necklace. There is also a document signed by your Grace acknowledging the receipt of five thousand pounds borrowed by your Grace from Mr. Walkinshaw. With the existence and whereabouts of these things your Grace is familiar. But your Grace is not aware that there is also in that parcel a certificate, signed by one of the leading jewel experts of London, in which he testifies that the alleged diamonds of the necklace are not diamonds at all, but — paste!"

The Duchess, an eminently healthy and vigorous specimen of femininity, had collapsed into a convenient elbow chair by that time. She sat drumming her fingers on its arms and staring at Bickmore, silently. And Bickmore nodded at her.

"Cold, plain truth, your Grace!" he said, icily. "Unpleasant fact!"

The Duchess found her tongue at last.

"What — what do you want?"

"I gave fifty guineas for the bureau, at the Walkinshaw sale," replied Bickmore. "As your Grace is so anxious to have it, I will take sixty guineas for it. But," he added, as the Duchess sprang to her feet, "on condition!"

"Condition?" exclaimed the Duchess. "What condition?"

"Mr. Postlethwaite, whose offices are just round the corner, is sole executor of the late Mr. Walkinshaw's will," continued Bickmore. "If your Grace will be good enough to go there and see him, and bring back to me a receipt showing that your Grace has paid him five thousand pounds, the bureau and its contents ——"

The Duchess's eyes flashed.

"Otherwise," concluded Bickmore, slowly, "otherwise, much as I should regret it —"

The Duchess went.

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Number Six in the series of riddle stories which stem from ancient folklore — from the folk-tales and folk-legends of all ages and all nations . . . The books of the Old Testament were written down between 600 BCE and 200 CE, and then, as now, their contents were the favorite subject matter of speeches and sermons. To help explain the Bible verses to the people, teachers and preachers devised many tales and parables, and these homilies — expositions of Biblical passages — were also written down. Today, we have but fragmentary and scattered quotations from this literature which was 1500 years a-growing and which is now known under the collective name of "Midrash" (Exposition).

"The Will of Justice" is such a tale, and it tells of the sagacity of Rabbi Joshua ben Hananyah, an historical character who flourished in Palestine in the Second Century. Though of humble birth, and only an impoverished needle-maker, Rabbi Joshua became an outstanding sage, teacher, and religious leader. His wit was matched only by his ugliness of appearance. Once, says another tale, the Roman Emperor's daughter asked him how so much wisdom could be contained in so ugly a body. Rabbi Joshua's reply was to urge the Emperor's daughter to go home and pour her father's best wines from their earthen jugs into vases of gold and alabaster. "But they will sour!" exclaimed the Emperor's daughter. "Of course," said Rabbi Joshua; "wisdom, like good wine, also keeps best in plain containers!"

HEBRAIC HOMILY: *The Will of Justice*

re-told by MARK RONDY

Avdi bent his head before the sage. He was glad the old fox was here — it would be a joy to cast him down too!

"May your coming be in peace, Rabbi Joshua ben Hananya!" said Avdi.

Rabbi Joshua echoed, "Peace," and said: "You are he who brought the news from Babylonia? . . . You did well, my son —" the sage was studying Avdi's face — "to make the long journey to Jerusalem in such good speed."

"I am happy to find favor in your eyes, Rabbi Joshua." Avdi tried to read behind his words — no, the old fox meant what he had said, no more.

"You are a faithful servant," murmured the sage, "even as you are named: *Avdi*, my servant. . . Now, take me to the young master, where he sits in mourning."

"The young master —?" Avdi

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paused, considering. Well, they would soon know who was master. And his name — he would change that too. He said, with slight emphasis on the name: "Bar-Abba sits in mourning in the inner chamber."

He turned and led the way. They found young Bar-Abba squatting shoeless on the floor, his clothes torn and his head unkempt, his cheeks ashen, his eyes red and rough with weeping.

"Blessed be the True Judge!" Bar-Abba bowed his face to the ground before the sage.

"May He comfort you, my son," said Rabbi Joshua, "together with all of the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem."

Avdi stood by, waiting. There was plenty of time. Let them speak to him first — the masters to the slave!

At last Bar-Abba looked up at him. "There is something . . . ?" he asked.

Avdi nodded. "Something, indeed!" He fixed a bold stare on the young man. "The will of my master, your father — peace rest upon him!"

Bar-Abba frowned. "Will?"

Avdi reached inside his tunic and brought out a small scroll. This he unwrapped without haste, savoring every movement.

"While the son pursued his studies, here in Jerusalem," he told them, "his father, my master — peace upon him! — felt his time approaching. He wrote this will, and signed it, and had it witnessed by the doctor who attended him."

"My son," said Rabbi Joshua in his mild fashion, "is this the time, on Bar-Abba's first day of mourning . . . ?"

"Because of its unusual nature," explained Avdi, crackling the parchment between his fingers, "I fear I must bring it to his attention at once. After we settle one small matter, I must hasten back to Babylonia."

"Fear, my son?" The sage rested a hand on Bar-Abba's shoulder, as if he sensed the young man's stiffening to attention.

Avdi looked down at the scroll in his hands. It was like a weapon, which all must fear — like a master, whose commands all must obey.

He said, "My master — peace upon him! — in his wisdom left a will that may not please his son."

Bar-Abba rose up from his crouch on the floor, took a cramped step forward, with outstretched hand. "Let me see this — this will that you say that my father wrote upon his deathbed!"

"I will read it to you," said Avdi, unmoved. "Listen!" He raised the scroll but did not look upon it. He spoke from memory: " 'When I am gathered to my ancestors, let my houses, my estates, my slaves, my animals — all that is mine or that shall come to be mine, belong —' " he lifted his head in triumph — " 'to Avdi, my slave and steward of my household —' "

He stopped, to watch Rabbi Joshua seize the struggling Bar-Abba and hold him back by the arms.

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" '— in whose hands,' " Avdi continued, his voice shaking with power, " 'I place every possession that God has granted to me, on this condition: My son, Bar-Abba, when he learns of my death, may choose from my belongings one thing as his own. Signed, Abba ben Dov, and witnessed, Akabiah ben Eli, physician.' "

"Be still, my son," Rabbi Joshua told the panting youth. "I will examine the scroll."

"It cannot be my father's writing!" Bar-Abba was shivering, as if from illness. "He was out of his wits! This — this fellow coerced him!" The sage shook his head, but Bar-Abba stormed on. "It is impossible, impossible! It is not the inheritance, Rabbi, it is not the money! But that my beloved father should disown me! And for this — this —"

"Considering this scroll," Avdi's acid voice cut into the young man's words, "it does not become *you* to speak to *me* in this manner." Avdi smiled. "Come, make your choice — a jewel, a garment, a book? . . . I must be gone."

"Let us not raise our voices," said Rabbi Joshua, "in a house of mourning . . . Bar-Abba, my son, this will is genuine. The writing, the signature — I have seen them so many times while he lived! And it is witnessed according to the law, by a most reputable doctor whose word no one can doubt."

Avdi nodded agreement. Rabbi Joshua turned to him.

"The inheritance, my son — the houses, estates, slaves, animals, and so forth — it is all secure, as the master left it?"

So the old fox was too shrewd to contest the will! Instead, it was clear, he would try his best to buy Avdi off.

"It is all as the master left it," Avdi assured him. "It is in charge of the Vizier's agent, until Bar-Abba makes his choice and so fulfills the will. Then — it is mine — it is all mine!"

"That too was well done." Rabbi Joshua turned back to the red-faced Bar-Abba. "Do not speak, my son, of madness, of coercion. Above all, do not speak ill of your father — peace upon him! He was my friend, and a learned man, honored in his generation for all his deeds. This will he also made out of his wisdom and understanding."

"Yes, yes," crowed Avdi. How much, he wondered, would the old fox offer him — a half? a third? How pleasant to dicker, and then take all anyway!

Rabbi Joshua touched Bar-Abba's shoulder, in gentle remonstrance. "Indeed, my son," he continued, "this is the will of a loving father, whose care to the last moment was for the son whom he cherished so dearly."

Avdi gaped. The old fox was mad! Or had he some trick — ?

"Do you not see?" sighed Rabbi Joshua, shaking the young man's shoulder as if waking one who slept. "Do you not see?"

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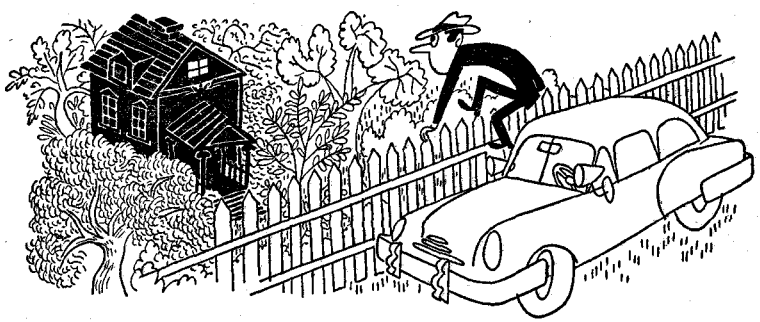
EDITORS' NOTE: *What has Rabbi Joshua in mind? How could the terms of the will possibly show that Bar-Abba's father cared for his son? This is a very clever riddle, we warn you, but you now have all the facts that Rabbi Joshua had — and that wise old man solved the problem. So, happy puzzling!*

"Your father — peace upon him! — did not trust this Avdi," said Rabbi Joshua. "It might be weeks, months, before you heard of his death. He feared Avdi might not send you word, might waste your inheritance in the meantime, perhaps even rob you of it. And so, he left it all to *him*, knowing he would care well for his own property. And he made it a condition of the will that you hear of his death.

"And so it was! The inheritance stands untouched, unspoiled. And Avdi has lost no time in notifying you —"

Avdi interrupted, shouting, "This will — !"

"This will," pronounced the sage, "grants the son a choice of one possession of his father's, and gives Avdi the entire inheritance. Bar-Abba, choose *him*, choose *Avdi* —" he shut his hand into a fist, as one grasping a prize — "and all that he, the slave, owns becomes yours!"



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When this story was first published twenty years ago, it was called "Murder by Mistake." We changed the title to "They Got the Wrong Guy." Not because it has a deeper meaning, but because the latter title seems more in tone with the kind of story Raoul Whitfield wrote — more typical of the hardboiled yarn which flourished two decades ago and had such a profound influence on 'tec technique.

Raoul Whitfield's work in the rough, tough school was not as good as the best or as bad as the worst. Seldom on the highest level of inspiration, his stories were nevertheless typical of hardboiledism. They revealed most of the virtues and most of the faults of the Hammett-Daly-Nebel-Chandler approach: the lacquered style; the artificially mannered restraint; the curt, clipped obliqueness; the brittle dialogue, seemingly inconsequential and irrelevant, heavily loaded with vernacular, and so curiously repetitious (reminding us unfairly that pulp writers have always been paid by the word); the sense of impending, but irritatingly delayed action; the perverted gallantry and bitter sentimentality which inevitably creep into the heroes' and heroines' emotions; the triumph of justice, however rude and crude its method and manner; and the slightly decadent quality which seems to hang over all the tough tales. You will find that same aura of decadence in "They Got the Wrong Guy," and it derives from something more than the fact that the story is now twenty years old and that it recalls, with unpleasant nostalgia, the ways and days of the speakeasies.

Perhaps the hardboiled school can best be summed up in the words of the protagonist of "They Got the Wrong Guy." Don Burney, private eye, says: "It wasn't worth it, but then it was a deal." It wasn't worth it — *the code of cynicism and false values;* but then it was a deal — *the code which stamps a man's word as a debt of honor and which brands welshing as the most unforgivable of sins.*

THEY GOT THE WRONG GUY

by RAOUL WHITFIELD

ROGER GRATTON kept staring eyes on the lips of the uniformed officer who was bending over him. He was a big man, with fine shoulders and a large chest. His soft felt hat lay in the gutter, ten feet away; a small red stain showed on the bit of ripped shirt, where the waistcoat had been

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torn away. Gratton's face was white and twisted; his lips moved but he didn't speak.

The cop was young and excited. He kept repeating over and over:

"Who done it, Mister — who done it?"

The crowd was thickening about the figure on the pavement; the cop twisted his head and waved them back. Someone said:

"Give the guy air — give him air."

Gratton tried to lift his shoulders, got the fingers of his left hand over his abdomen, twisted on his side, and relaxed. His eyes stared up at the harness bull, but they saw nothing. The cop straightened and swore grimly.

"Hell — the guy's dead!"

The crowd scattered as a second officer shoved his way through. He was an older man; he leaned forward, looked at Gratton.

"Jeeze!" he breathed. "It's Charlie Laye. Sure as hell, they got him!"

The young officer said: "I heard the shots — I was over on Sixth Avenue. I run around the corner and he's walking from side to side hanging on to his stomach. Then he goes down."

"See any cars — moving fast?" The officer who had just come up spoke in clipped sentences.

The crowd was closing in again. The older cop bawled them out and they started shoving back. In the distance a siren wailed. It increased in tone. The young cop said:

"There was cars going towards Fifth — it sounded like backfire, only it was different. That's why I run around the corner."

The older officer grunted, leaned down. The dead man wore no overcoat; from an inner pocket of his dinner coat the cop drew a thin wallet. He opened it and a street light reached the engraved card that was framed back of the isinglass.

"Hell!" the officer with the wallet muttered. "It *ain't* Charlie Laye — it's a guy named Gratton."

He stared down at the dead man's white face. The ambulance slid up close to the curb and the intern grinned at both officers.

"Pretty night," he said cheerfully. "I shouldn't be working on —"

He stopped, looking down at the figure of Roger Gratton. Bending forward he moved his right hand towards the right wrist of the dead man. When he straightened up he said:

"Never mind the stretcher, Mike, it's a morgue job."

He lighted a cigarette and ran his eyes along the brownstone houses that fronted the street. He said to the older officer:

"Got anything, Joe?"

Riley shook his head. The intern said:

"Speakeasy street — got him in the belly — maybe a little higher. He could walk some. Well, let's get back."

The driver swung back to the front seat and the ambulance rolled away. The younger officer started towards Sixth Avenue, but Riley called after him: "Lay off the beer."

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Someone in the crowd chuckled. A voice said hoarsely:

"Is he dead, Officer?"

Riley got a pad and pencil in his fingers. As he started to scrawl he said grimly:

"He'll never be any deader."

Don Burney caught Riley as he was going on duty the next night. Burney was medium in size, with dark hair and eyes, lips that were a little too thin and a good chin. There was a short scar just below his left ear, but the bullet hadn't touched bone. Burney said without any greeting:

"Got anything new on the Gratton kill, Joe?"

Riley shook his head. "The quiet clothes boys are working it," he replied. "But not too hard. It was just one of those things, Don — a mistake."

Burney nodded. "Sure," he said. "Someone thought Gratton was Charlie Laye, eh?"

"You talk like you don't believe it, Don," he said. "You working it for the agency?"

Burney said, not answering the question:

"Charlie Laye's been in Atlantic City for two days — the papers were full of that stuff."

Riley grunted: "Well, the guns know trains run out of Atlantic City," he said.

Burney smiled. "Laye never used the speaks on Forty-eighth Street. That's out of his district, Riley. He hates the guts of the guy that says yes and no along that particular stretch."

Riley spat towards the curb and shrugged. He spoke slowly.

"The guess is that Charlie got careless. He's been showing himself a lot of places that were dangerous. Maybe the guns were just cruising around, sort of looking for him. They spotted Gratton — and he looks a lot like Laye. They opened up. Just a mistake, Don."

Burney grinned. "Yeah," he said.

Riley looked at the younger man.

"You were a sweet dick when you were on the Force, Don. But don't go wrong because you're working out of an agency. Who's got you on it — the bank?"

Burney looked at his watch.

"Pretty good light on Forty-eighth. It was about eleven ten when Gratton got the works. Lot of people around — had a big crowd around him in a hurry. Cars parked on the street. Mighty funny time for a kill — and not such a hot spot. Gratton looks something like Laye, I'll admit that. But not *too* much like him. You saw him after he was dead, Joe — his face twisted up. Laye looks like that most of the time. But when Gratton was alive he had a cheerful expression —"

Riley said: "What are you getting at, Don? You mean them guns *knew* they weren't spraying at Laye?"

Don Burney shrugged. "Something like that," he said.

Riley started to walk away, turned. He said suddenly:

"You're working for someone. You

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know more than I do. Why didn't you say that first?"

Burney smiled. "Don't get sore, Joe," he said. "I may need your help. Who'd they pull in?"

"What's the big idea? You don't have to come up to a precinct station to find that out."

Burney went over close to the older man and said quietly:

"They pulled in 'Babe' Sonner, Carpi, 'Ducky' Weiss, and that coke eater, Feranci. A fine bunch, Joe — not a killer in the carload."

Riley got his eyes slitted on the detective's dark ones.

"I'm not running Headquarters. I'm walking a beat, Don."

Burney nodded. "Sure," he replied. "Sure — since you pulled a raid in the wrong spot, you're walking a beat."

Riley got his head low on his shoulders, forward.

"What you getting at, Don?" he snapped. "I always figured you a good guy."

Burney grinned at the older man. "Take it easy," he said steadily. "That kid walking the beat next to yours — maybe he was the excuse for *their taking a chance on the street.* He was pretty new on the job."

Riley swore. "He picked out submachine-gun fire from the noise a truck makes," he said grimly. "He wasn't so dumb."

Burney nodded. "Joe," he said softly, "I think you're a good guy. You know more about Gratton than I do. I've been talking to that kid copper. When you read the name from Gratton's card case you acted as though you'd never heard of it before. But you had. Gratton was a stock-market man. He wasn't known along Broadway. He liked to play games — and you raided one, three months ago. Right after that you got a tough quiet-clothes job, and when you didn't get the guy you were after — you got busted. The Force figured that was *why* you got busted. I think maybe it was the raid."

Riley looked at the detective and chuckled softly. It was a very nasty chuckle.

"And so when I found someone had made a mistake and got Gratton instead of Charlie Laye, I tried to cover up things, eh? I was glad Gratton got the works, and I didn't want the killers grabbed. Or maybe I did the job myself."

Don Burney grinned.

"Come through, Joe," he said. "You tried to cover something. You acted as though you didn't know Gratton, in front of that new cop. Tell me something that'll help. It can't hurt you — it wasn't your job."

Riley said: "All right — I'll tell you something that'll help. You're a good guy, Don — so I'll tell you. This is it — to hell with you!"

He turned abruptly, went up the few steps into the precinct station. Don Burney watched him go, lighted his cigarette. He got it between his lips, took a card from his pocket and read the address aloud.

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"One Seventy-seven Park Avenue."

A voice sounded from the steps of the precinct station. "Hello, Don, working the Gratton kill?"

Burney smiled at Sergeant Losker.

"Riley tells me it was just a mistake," he said. "They were after Charlie Laye."

The desk sergeant grinned. "Yeah," he replied. "They look a lot alike."

Burney said slowly: "It was a lucky break for Laye, eh?"

Sergeant Losker said: "And a tough one for Gratton."

Burney nodded. "Sure," he replied. "It's no fun being dead."

He waved a hand and moved towards Park Avenue. It was a warm night and there was a fog. He breathed to himself, as he walked slowly eastward:

"Marion Drance — nice name. Busby said she was paying well for the job. Maybe she knows something. Maybe she's just sentimental. Maybe —"

He checked himself. A figure was moving along the street, coming towards him. The man was short, thin. He had a large head and he kept turning it from side to side in short, jerky movements. Burney stepped in close to a darkened store window. When the man got opposite him he said:

"Ducky!"

The little man whirled around. His right hand whipped downward, behind him. His eyes were on Burney's face. He drew in his breath deeply; it made a wheezing sound. Burney said:

"All right — all right. You're getting jumpy in your old age, Ducky."

He kept both hands at his side and moved out from the store window. Weiss got a foolish grin on his face.

"I ain't been — feelin' well."

Burney grinned. "I heard you got stomach trouble, over in Philly."

Weiss started moving his head jerkily again.

"I just happened to be in a place, getting a beer — and someone started spilling lead," he explained in a husky voice. "I got a piece in the belly."

Burney said: "Yeah, that's tough. Had you down at Headquarters on the Gratton kill, didn't they?"

Ducky looked suspicious. He nodded. "If a flatfoot faints from overwork up in the Bronx — they grab me," he muttered. "I ain't never used a rod."

Burney grinned. "Who did the Gratton job, Ducky? Give me a steer. I got you out of a bad frame-up once. Don't forget that."

Weiss said huskily: "I ain't forgettin' it. That was a bum job, maybe. Someone was out for Charlie Laye. They got the wrong guy."

A taxi swerved in close to the curbing, to avoid a rough spot in the macadam. Ducky's little body swerved with the cab. His head jerked. Burney stepped in close to him.

"What you afraid of, Weiss?" he snapped. "You got the finger on you?"

The cab was out in the street again, moving rapidly towards Eighth Avenue. Weiss got the silly grin on his

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face again. He showed his bad teeth.

"Hell, no," he muttered. "It's my stomach trouble."

Burney stepped away from him.

"Sure," he said. "That's tough stuff — stomach trouble."

He nodded his head, turned his back on the little man. He walked eastward again. When he reached Broadway he went into a cigar store, took a small envelope from a pocket, and deposited in it the few threads that his thumb and forefinger had pinched from the material of Weiss's gray suit.

Don Burney put the envelope back in an inner pocket, bought cigarettes. A man beside him tapped the headlines and said to the clerk:

"They're killing 'em in front of houses now. They took this guy Gratton for someone else."

The clerk said: "Them machine guns are tough to dodge."

Burney went outside and stood waiting for a green traffic light. He said grimly to himself:

"I seem to be the only guy that thinks it *wasn't* a mistake." He grinned. "Me — and the guy that turned loose the lead."

Marion Drance was a good-looking blonde with a nice figure. She had blue eyes and small features. She sat on a rose-colored divan, smoked a cigarette as though it really gave her a kick, and watched Don Burney closely as she talked. He got the idea that she was nervous and trying to hide the fact.

"It isn't sentiment. I've never been in love with — Roger Gratton. But he's been very good to me. I want the person or persons who murdered him to suffer. Roger never hurt anyone in his life."

Burney nodded. "The police idea is that it was murder by mistake," he said. "Charlie Laye is supposed to be on the spot. They think Gratton was mistaken for Laye. They look quite a bit alike."

Marion Drance tapped ashes from her cigarette into a small tray.

"I don't care what it was — I want you to get the killers."

Burney nodded. "I'll need help," he replied. "No one seems to have seen the car from which the lead was pumped. Two persons saw a car speeding towards Fifth Avenue, after the shooting. They didn't get the license number. It was a closed car. A man on the other side of the street saw Gratton walking towards Sixth Avenue, bent forward and swaying. He heard the shots — but there were cars parked along the curb and he doesn't seem to have any idea about what actually happened. There was a truck near Sixth Avenue, and he thought it might have been backfire. Three bullets got Gratton — apparently there weren't any misses. A short burst, at close range. It's remarkable that he could move along the way he did. I'll need your help."

She shook her head.

"There's nothing I can do," she said. "Nothing I can tell you. I hadn't seen Roger for three weeks —"

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She checked herself. Burney said: "Until the night of the murder?"

She got up, swore twice, and walked over to the living-room window. Burney spoke in a quiet voice.

"This isn't going to be an easy job, Miss Drance. Things are going to be covered up. Busby felt you might help me. You are most interested — you're paying for the work."

She turned, faced him.

"Gratton was unmarried. He had a lot of money. Some of it comes to me, I think. Most to a cousin now living in Paris. He was an official at the National Bank. He gambled, but never for very high stakes. I've been divorced three years. I have money — Gratton never gave me money. Presents, jewelry — but never money. I'd been away from New York for three weeks. He came to see me last night. Dinner, a show — and —"

She stopped again.

"You came back here?"

"He had an engagement," she said. "He put me in a cab, at the theatre. Forty-second, just west of Broadway. That was the last —"

Burney waited for her to go on. She said finally:

"I got here at about eleven. I didn't know about his — death — until this morning. I read of it, in the papers."

Burney rose from his chair.

"It's a nice story, even if it doesn't happen to be the truth," he said.

Her body got tense. "It's the truth," she said.

Burney said coldly: "If you're going to lie, don't tell me anything. It'll take too much time to get the lies separated from the truth. I'm an agency detective, and my job is to do what the head of the agency tells me. He's told me to find a killer."

She was standing with her fingers clenched at her sides.

"I'll call the agency and have them drop the case. I won't be treated like this. You can't talk this way to me."

Burney smiled grimly. "I wouldn't do that," he advised. "You may have gone to the theatre last night, and you probably got back here at eleven. But you didn't go to the theatre with Roger Gratton."

He caught the flicker of fear in her eyes. Then her body relaxed; she walked back to the divan, seated herself.

"No?"

Burney kept smiling. "No," he replied. "It just happens that I know where Gratton was — between the hours of eight and ten twenty-five."

She made a little gesture with her left hand. Burney looked and saw the stubs of two theatre tickets.

"Don't be a fool, Clara," he said steadily. "I've talked with Ducky."

Her hands went to her throat. Fear was clear in her eyes. She cried out hoarsely:

"That little coker —"

Burney looked down at her.

"It didn't work, Clara," he said. "I've had you spotted for three years. You've been working a nice racket since you quit the mob out in Pittsburgh. You've got money, and the

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ones you got it from could afford to lose it. But you were dumb to play this way with the agency."

She said bitterly: "Sit down, Burney. Lay off the sob stuff. You haven't got a thing on me."

Burney stood where he was. "The agency has got your check for five hundred," he said. "You want us to turn up the killer of Roger Gratton. All right, we'll do it, Clara!"

She said again: "Sit down, Burney. I'll talk straight."

Burney went over and sat down. "Sure," he said. "The spot's tough. You'd *better* talk straight."

She said slowly, bitterly:

"I had to play it this way, Burney. I had to. I'm giving it to you straight. I figured you'd get the job, if I went to Busby. I didn't think you had me spotted. It's that cokey Weiss —"

Burney cut in. "Never mind getting sore. You played with Van Cleusen for a while, and when you moved over here I checked up. Knew who you were — knew you changed your name to Marion Drance. That's just agency routine, Clara."

She said grimly: "But Ducky's been talking."

He nodded. "Sure," he agreed. "They pulled him in and kept the dope away from him. But he didn't talk about you, Clara. Come on, what's the game?"

She spoke slowly:

"Roger and me — we had a hell of a scrap, here in the apartment. He was going away — to France, he said. I told him he was lying — he was just sick of me. He had theatre tickets, but he threw them at me, walked out. At about seven-thirty. He called up, a half hour later — you know that if you were tagging him. He'd been drinking. He acted scared. He said if anything happened to him I wouldn't get money, and I'd better call the deal off. He acted terribly scared."

"What did you say?"

She blinked back tears. "I told him I didn't understand. He said: 'You understand, all right. You call 'em off — or I'll fix you.' Then he hung up. I'm sure he'd been drinking. I went to the theatre alone. I got a late paper — had it sent up. I couldn't sleep. They had a flash on his murder. Then I called the agency."

Burney moved away a few feet. "You figured you wouldn't be spotted, and you didn't know what Gratton might have said. So you wanted to work up an alibi for yourself — and get detectives on the case. Then if Gratton's words over the phone were traced you could say that you didn't know what he'd meant, and that if you were guilty you wouldn't be trying to turn yourself up."

She said slowly: "Yes."

Burney said: "Well, you put up the money. Who would he be afraid of?"

She shook her head. "I don't know," she said. "I don't know why he said that to me, over the phone. I didn't know he was going to leave me much money. Not enough for —"

She stopped. Burney smiled a little.

"You had nerve, working it in this

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way, Clara," he said. "But if the police had traced you —"

The buzzer sounded. The girl started; her eyes were wide on Burney's. He said softly:

"You got a break. Gratton had Joe Riley busted for raiding one of his games. Joe doesn't care much whether the killers are turned up. That'll help."

The buzzer sounded again. Clara Haines rose, dabbed at her eyes with a small handkerchief, went into the foyer. A voice said:

"Miss Drance?"

Burney swore softly. He breathed to himself:

"Denton — Headquarters. That's a tough break."

The girl came back into the room, trying to keep fear from her eyes. Jake Denton followed her in. A plain-clothesman that Burney didn't know came in behind Denton. Burney smiled at the Headquarters detective, watched Denton raise his eyebrows in surprise.

"Hello, Jake," he greeted. "How's things?"

Denton was a big man with gray hair and blue, mild eyes. He nodded.

"Hello, Burney," he returned. "Working the Gratton kill?"

Burney nodded. "Yeah," he said. "Looks like an accident."

Denton grinned. "Sure," he said. "But we got to be careful. If Miss Drance will come down to Headquarters with us —"

Clara Haines said in a strained voice:

"I'd rather not — I feel quite terrible. Do you mind telling me how my name is connected —"

She got false haughtiness in her tone. Denton said casually:

"Oh, hell, Clara — lay off that line. Grab your chapeau."

Clara Haines started to speak, changed her mind. She stared wildly at Burney. Burney said:

"Sure, why not, Clara? You're all right. It's just a mistake."

The girl said wildly: "I didn't do it. I didn't have anything to do —"

Denton said: "Well, that's all right. Maybe it's just something about Gratton's will, Clara. You're getting a break, maybe. Or maybe it's about a telephone call."

The girl's body was suddenly tense. She dropped her hands to her sides, looked at Don Burney.

"I gave it to you straight, Burney," she said. "I swear it! You can check me up. Be right with me, Burney! Be —"

Burney nodded. "Take it easy — go along with the boys, Clara," he said. "Because a guy gets himself dead and happens to leave you some coin — that doesn't mean much."

Jake Denton grinned at Burney. "It meant a lot when you were on the Force, Don," he said. "And a lot depends on what sort of a gal the money goes to, eh?"

Burney went over and took his hat from a chair. He smiled at Denton.

"Gratton looked a lot like Charlie Laye," he said. "It's not a good time to look like that gent, Jake."

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Denton yawned. "Gratton wasn't worried about *that* — not when he called Clara last night. All right, Miss Drance —" he grinned at her — "let's get moving."

Burney moved towards the foyer. "I'll get out first," he said. "I've got places to go."

He smiled at the girl. Denton looked serious.

"If you get anything, give the police a break, Don." There was grim humor in his tone. "We're all good guys."

Burney nodded. "Sure — when I get Gratton's killer I'll bring him down and turn him over to you personally."

Denton looked at Clara Haines. "Fine," he said without enthusiasm. "Maybe we'll let Clara get a thrill — by looking at him."

Burney said: "It may take me a few hours to turn him up."

Denton grinned. "That's all right," he said carelessly. "Clara may still be with us."

Marcus Busby, the agency head, was a short, homely man — lazy and possessed of a remarkable memory. He sat in the chair back of his desk, slumped low, and frowned at Burney.

"The precinct police figure Gratton was killed by mistake. Headquarters thinks our client ran the job. How about you, Burney?"

Don Burney smiled. "Forty-eighth Street is pretty well lighted. I'm not sure that Gratton got the dose from a moving car. I think the killers would have known he wasn't Laye, if they were after Laye. I think they'd have known Laye was in Atlantic City. Clara Haines is telling some lies and some truths. She got scared. She thought hiring a private detective would give her a better break. The police traced the phone call — maybe the switchboard girl at One Seventy-seven listened in. I told Clara I knew of Gratton's movements between eight and ten twenty-five. That wasn't so — but I knew she was lying. I saw the theatre stubs when I went in — and I made the guess that she was going to pull that stunt about everything being all right between Gratton and herself — when she left him. That's old. When I smashed that story she talked straight."

Busby frowned. "She was framed, maybe," he muttered.

Burney said: "She's in a tough spot. She hasn't got a criminal record, but she's been mixed up in a lot of shady deals. The bulls have got a tough case, and she's an out. They wouldn't mind thinking that Gratton got wise to the fact that she was going to bump him off for the coin he was leaving her. Maybe they can get somewhere from there."

Busby rubbed an eyebrow with a fingertip. He said lazily:

"How about Weiss? He used to run in the same mob."

Burney nodded. "He figures it was just a mistake. I ran into him. Maybe I can run into him again. The police can't get a witness worth a damn."

Busby grunted: "They never can,"

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he said. "Everyone sees the same thing differently."

Don Burney got up. "You want this worked straight, of course. She hired us to get the murderer."

Busby swore. "If she's it," he said, "turn her up. We're in the business for the money."

Burney went towards the door.

"I can't figure it," he said. "She had lots of nerve, if she ran that job and then called us in. She was back at the apartment at five minutes of eleven. She talked with the doorman, and the elevator man. She called a woman friend at eleven-eight, according to the phone records at the place. She was still talking at eleven-fifteen."

Busby said: "Hell, you didn't expect her to be on Forty-eighth Street. She's smooth."

Burney opened the door. "I'll go over and work Forty-eighth."

Busby slumped lower in his chair. "Stay sober," he said.

Burney grinned. "I'm thinking of our client," he said. "Sweet girl."

Busby swore. "Lovely," he said grimly. "And they may be talking roughly to her, right now."

Burney said: "If they use any words she hasn't heard before, they won't be talking English."

He went out and down the stairs. It was ten-fifteen. He walked northward along Broadway until he reached Forty-eighth Street. Then he turned eastward. At Sixth Avenue he stopped for several minutes and listened to the rumble from the elevated trains. Then he picked out the first speakeasy and stood in front of the grilled door. When the round face of Andy appeared Burney said:

"I want to get a stick of peppermint for that brat of mine."

Andy grinned and opened the door. "Sure," he returned. "And a pretzel."

Don Burney went inside. He ordered beer and sampled the free lunch.

"Just between the two of us, Andy, did Roger Gratton use this spot?"

Andy shook his head. "Not swell enough for that guy," he said. "You mean the dead one?"

Burney nodded. "The banker," he said. "He was done in about a hundred yards from this joint."

"Yeah," he said. "I read about it."

Burney narrowed his dark eyes on Andy's and smiled.

"He was the banker," he repeated.

Andy said: "Yeah — and something else, maybe."

Burney kept on smiling. "He gambled a little now and then, Andy," he said. "How about a spot? Supposing he wanted a drink. Where would he get it, on this block?"

Andy said, his face becoming serious:

"I lost five bucks on 'Old Dutch' this afternoon. I ain't never had luck with the doggies."

Burney lighted a cigarette. "It isn't for me, Andy," he said. "They're framing a pretty good kid — a female. I'd like to get a line on what Gratton was doing, just before he got the dose."

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Andy ran a rag over the table again, he said:

"I think I'll quit playin' the nags, at that. Yes, sir."

Burney swore swoftly. "All right," he said. "I wasn't looking for a miracle."

He went back to the bar and had a second beer. Then he went outside, and walked slowly towards Fifth Avenue. When he got to the spot where Gratton had fallen, he walked to the curb and stood for several minutes, smoking and looking around. A uniformed figure came along; he turned slightly, smiled at the cop. The cop did not smile back.

Burney said: "Nice night, Briggs. Got anything on the Gratton job?"

The young flatfoot swore. "Yeah, I got hell — for talking to you."

Burney widened his eyes. "That so?" he said. "From Joe Riley, eh?"

The cop nodded.

"Joe's all right," he said. "Only he's on the Force — and I'm not. He thinks I'm having things too soft."

The cop said nothing. Burney listened to the clatter of an elevated train, above Sixth Avenue. He said:

"You were around the corner when you heard what you figured were shots. When you made the turn did you spot Gratton right away?"

The cop turned around without a word and walked towards Sixth.

Burney whistled softly. "Riley *was* sore," he muttered. "And that's funny, too."

He went across the street and tried a second speakeasy. After he tried six of them he got into a cab and drove eastward to First Avenue. The cab driver turned south. Ten minutes later they were downtown, where the speaks had sawdust on the floor and funny pictures pasted on the mirrors back of the bars. In the second place he found Ducky Weiss, sitting in a corner by himself. He went over and sat beside the man. Ducky looked at him with dull eyes. Burney said:

"It's all over, Ducky. The bulls got her."

Weiss sat up a little and widened his eyes. There was an empty whiskey glass before him and some of the liquor had been spilled on the table. He said in a thick voice:

"Yeah?"

Burney nodded. "Yeah," he replied. "It's too bad, too. She'll get a big stretch. She was a fool to play it that way. He got wise to the fact that she was having him gunned out and he told her to call the deal off, over the phone. Someone listened in — and that did the trick."

Weiss sat up straight in the chair and kept his eyes on the scar under Burney's left ear.

"What the hell you talkin' about, Burney?" he muttered. "You're just — usin' words."

Burney nodded. "They mean something," he said. "Maybe you squealed on her, Ducky — maybe you told them where she was living, and what name she was using."

Weiss shoved back his chair a little. His movements were slow and controlled. Burney said:

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"You've been using the white stuff. Don't get careless, Ducky."

The little man smiled. It was a smile that Burney didn't like.

"I'm not hurting you, Ducky — remember, I got you out of a tough spot once."

Weiss took one hand away from the table and continued to smile.

"Sure," he said. "So you could use me the next time."

Burney listened to the crash of a glass, somewhere in another room of the building. A radio sent distorted music from some spot above. He looked hurt.

"Listen, Ducky," he said. "The bulls have got Clara. That's not so good. She was playing Gratton, and he was about through with her. I figure he wanted to quit. He was leaving her some coin — but if he got away he might change his mind, see?"

Weiss took his other hand away from the table. Burney was sitting with his right hand in the right pocket of his gray suit. He shifted the automatic a little, and got the safety lock off. He smiled at Weiss.

"I'm not so sure it was Clara's job," he said.

Weiss wet his lips with the tip of his tongue, swallowed. He said hoarsely:

"She didn't know anything about it. They're framin' her."

Burney nodded. "If *you* know anything, Ducky, give it to me. You can move out for a while. I'll handle it."

Weiss said sneeringly:

"What the hell do you care about that moll?"

Burney leaned across the table.

"I'm giving it to you straight, Weiss. She got scared, after she got this call. She used the agency — said she wanted a detective to grab off Gratton's killer. She paid us coin. I'm going through with my job."

Weiss swore.

"That kill was all wrong, Burney. It was a bum job — a mistake."

Burney said: "And you don't know anything about it, Ducky?"

Weiss shook his head.

Burney leaned back in the chair across the small table from Weiss.

"Broke?" he asked slowly.

Weiss just looked at him. Burney spoke in a casual tone.

"You're all right now but when you need the next sniff, that'll be different. You can get fixed nice for fifty bucks."

Weiss lowered his head and swayed a little from side to side.

"Them hunks of lead left a mark on you, Burney. I remember the day you got that smear. It ain't so many years ago. You were out of your district, Burney."

Don Burney nodded. His face was expressionless. But he didn't like the tone Weiss was using. The little coker had his insides fixed right. He was thinking too well.

"Yeah," he agreed. "But I wasn't working on your old mob, Ducky. And what I was working on — that came my way."

Weiss nodded. His eyes narrowed. "You got a break," he said.

Burney smiled. "I need one this

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time," he replied. "If you know anything that'll help Clara Haines, spill it, Ducky. I'll hand you fifty — and you can take a trip or hole in. It'll be easier tomorrow."

Weiss made a movement with his left hand. Burney tightened his grip on the butt of the automatic; his finger pulled a little on the trigger. A twenty-dollar bill dropped on the table's surface. Weiss raised his voice.

"Hey, Pedro!" he called huskily. "Set 'em up!"

Burney shrugged. "Fifty to put with what you've got — that won't hurt any," he said.

Weiss leaned across the table. "Listen, dick," he said grimly, "I think maybe you're all right. But so am I, see? If that moll got roped in on this deal, that's just too bad. We was in the same mob, yeah, but we split. I don't know a thing on the Gratton kill. That's that."

Burney pulled his soft hat low over his eyes as the waiter came up.

Burney spoke in a low voice. "Beer."

Weiss chuckled. He ordered whiskey. When the waiter went away he grinned at Burney. He was feeling more and more confident.

"Beer, eh? Working on a job, eh? What makes you think I'm wise to the Gratton deal?"

Burney said slowly: "I went over to see Clara Haines. She worked a trick name when she called the agency. But it happened we were wise. I told her who she was and said I'd just met you. She got sort of excited, Ducky."

There was a nasty expression in the little man's eyes. He said:

"They pulled me in and they turned me loose. I didn't say anything. They didn't get wise to that moll from me."

The waiter came up with a whiskey and a beer. Ducky Weiss shoved the change in a pocket, but he kept his right hand out of sight. Burney said:

"Look out that rod doesn't go off when you're not looking, Weiss."

The little man grinned, tossed off his drink. Burney got rid of half the beer. He stood up suddenly.

"All right," he said. "Maybe you're telling the truth, Ducky. Thanks for the drink."

Weiss leaned back and kept grinning at him. There was an expression in the back of his eyes that worried Burney. Weiss just nodded his head. Burney took his right hand out of his suit pocket.

"I feel sorry for that Haines kid," he said. "It's a tough spot."

Weiss said slowly: "How much did Gratton leave her?"

Burney swore softly. "Two hundred grand," he replied.

Weiss sucked in his breath.

"Straight?" he muttered. "Two hundred grand!"

Burney nodded. "In real money," he replied. "But if they frame her —"

Weiss was staring at him. Suddenly he narrowed his eyes, relaxed in his chair. He shook his head slowly.

"Hell — an' I don't know a thing on it, Burney. Not a thing."

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Don Burney shrugged. "See you again," he said.

When he got outside he drew a deep breath. He felt let down, tired. Ducky Weiss was fixed — he had his nerve. Even the two hundred grand idea hadn't worked on him.

Burney went across the narrow street and stood in a dark, warehouse doorway. Weiss came out thirty minutes later, looked up and down the street. He lighted a cigarette, walked westward towards Second Avenue. He walked rapidly, and he moved his head jerkily from side to side. Burney gave him distance. When he started along he breathed to himself:

"He's moving as though he's going somewhere that counts!"

At Third Avenue Weiss turned uptown. Don Burney crossed to the north side of the street, approached cautiously. He got his body close to a battered brick wall, looked northward on Third. A block distant a taxi was pulling out from the curb. It picked up speed rapidly. There was no sign of Weiss.

Burney swore, looked for another cab. There was none in sight. He started to walk rapidly northward on Third. An elevated train rattled overhead. A cab swung around from a side street, turned up the avenue. Burney whistled loudly. The cab kept on going. It looked as though Ducky Weiss was in the clear.

And then, as he stared at the cab that had pulled out from the curb, now two blocks away, he saw it swing in close to the curb. It slowed down. Burney moved out and stood back of an elevated pillar. He saw the short figure of Weiss as the man stepped from the cab. Weiss moved away, but the cab remained motionless. It had not stopped directly in front of the place to which the little man was going. He walked back a half square, moved suddenly into the entrance of what appeared to be a Third Avenue tenement house.

Burney said softly: "Wants to be sure of a cab. Has it waiting. If I can stick —"

He looked for another cab; there was none around. The hour of night and the section of the city — they didn't fit together. Cabs were difficult to find. And Ducky knew that.

Burney walked rapidly towards the cab, keeping on the far side of the avenue. He passed the cab, circled around, and came back towards it. He walked directly to the driver's side, spoke rapidly, with his eyes on the tenement entrance.

"I'm Burney — of Headquarters. The man who just got out of your cab is a suspect — of murder. Take him where he wants to go, but not too fast. After you get him there, if I see you, all right. If I don't, drive around for ten minutes and then head for Lindy's, on Broadway. Remember where he goes. Is that clear?"

The driver was a middle-aged man with a drooping mustache. He nodded. Burney slipped him a ten-dollar bill.

"Ten more, when I see you," he

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said. "I'm taking a chance on you — but I know what you look like."

The driver took the ten and said: "It's all right, Chief."

Burney got the cab between himself and the tenement entrance, went back across the street. A cab cruised downtown; he hailed it, keeping his eyes on the other side of the avenue. He pointed out the other cab to a fat-faced driver.

"We're following that fellow," he said. "But we don't want him to know it. Don't lose him, if you can help it. The other driver's fixed."

He got in the cab, slunk low in the seat. He waited five minutes. A black, closed car pulled near the curb, across the avenue, and stopped near the corner below the spot where Ducky's cab was waiting. No one descended from the car. Burney shook his head.

"Don't like it," he breathed. "May be wrong but it looks as though something's on."

Two men came suddenly from the tenement entrance. They went directly to the waiting cab. Neither was Ducky Weiss. They got inside, the cab started. Burney kept low in the seat and said to the driver:

"Go downtown a block — turn and follow."

The cab jerked forward. While they were turning, the black sedan that had pulled in near the curb got under way. It followed the other cab. Burney crouched low in the seat.

"Stay behind that black sedan."

The driver nodded his head. The three machines rolled uptown on Third Avenue. They were traveling fast. At Twenty-third Street the cab turned to the left, the black sedan turned to the right. Burney smiled grimly and said:

"That's enough. Get back to the spot where we waited. Let 'em both go."

When he left the cab he went into a small restaurant almost directly opposite the tenement and called Headquarters. He asked for Jake Denton.

"This is Burney," he said. "How's my client?"

Denton chuckled. "Sweet and pretty," he said. "We're letting some of the little guns see her. She hasn't said a thing, and we're being real nice to her. I think we'll let her go home pretty soon — and sort of see that she stays inside."

Burney said: "I wouldn't, Jake — I'd hold her down there. Something might happen to her on the way home."

Denton whistled softly. "Straight?"

Burney kept his eyes on the entrance of the tenement, across the avenue. The waiter back of the dirty counter was watching him sleepily. Burney kept his voice low and said:

"Sure — I'd hang on to her, Jake. I've got a hunch she's being framed."

Denton swore at him. A siren wailed in the distance. A man came out from the tenement, stood on the sidewalk, and stared up and down the avenue. He was hatless, and he smoked a cigarette nervously.

Burney said: "Do it your way — but I'd keep her at Headquarters."

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He hung up and went outside. A big black car pulled up in front of the tenement entrance. Men spilled from it. A uniformed copper ran across the avenue and joined them. Burney went across and followed the last man up shaky stairs. The place was filled with odors. A voice said:

"I heard this guy groanin' — I got the flat above. We broke in."

Another voice said: "Sure, that's the thing to do."

On the third floor a door was opened. Greenish light slanted out into the hallway. The men crowded inside, and Burney followed. He recognized Sam Taylor, who blinked at him.

"What are you doing here?" the detective asked.

Burney said: "I tailed Ducky Weiss over here, from a speakeasy."

One of the other detectives was bending down. He straightened up and Burney moved around him, looked down at the figure of Weiss. The little man was lying on his back; his eyes were staring at a dirty ceiling. There was blood on his face.

The detective who had straightened up said:

"Who are you?"

Taylor swore softly. "He's all right, Mac," he said. "Burney — used to be on the Force. Private stuff now."

An ambulance bell clanged outside the tenement. Taylor said:

"Well, that finishes Weiss. I'm surprised he moved around so long. He had it coming."

He regarded Burney curiously. Don lighted a new cigarette and said:

"Anyone hear shots?"

The man who had been out on the avenue said that he'd heard something that might have been shots. A little later he'd heard groans. He thought the shots were muffled. Taylor said:

"Used a coat — maybe a Maxim. He's got lead in his chest and stomach."

The ambulance doctor came in and didn't waste any time.

"Any one of the two or three or four bullets would have done the trick," he said. "But maybe he lived a few minutes, at that."

Taylor spoke to the man who had been out on the avenue.

"You turned in the call?"

The man nodded.

Taylor said: "Well, we've got to find out who rented this flat."

Burney smiled. "That'll be a cinch," he said sarcastically. "I'm going along. The tagging job is over."

Taylor said: "Maybe he knew someone, Burney — on the Gratton kill."

Burney shrugged. "Ducky always did know too much," he replied.

Taylor kept his eyes on Burney's.

"Maybe someone knew you were tailing him, Burney — and figured there was just a chance you might catch up with him."

Don grinned. "Thanks."

Burney went downstairs, walked up Third Avenue a few blocks, and hailed a cab. He said:

"Lindy's."

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He didn't get anywhere with the thinking he did on the way up. From his pocket he took the envelope and looked at the threads of material his fingernails had pinched from the dead man's coat. When he put the envelope back in his pocket again the cab was moving north of Forty-second, on Broadway.

He got out at the restaurant, paid up, and walked along the curb. The cab driver came through the crowd.

"I'm parked around the corner," he said. "I came right up, after I got rid of them two guys."

Burney said: "Where was that?"

The driver smiled faintly. "At the Twenty-third Street ferry," he said.

Burney swore. "Great," he breathed grimly. "That's an easy one. What did they look like?"

"They was both about the same size — and one of them needed a shave," he replied. "I didn't look at 'em much. You had me worried."

Burney handed the driver a ten-dollar bill.

"It wasn't worth it," he said, "but then it was a deal."

It was almost midnight. Busby sat with his feet propped up on the desk and frowned at Don Burney. The small office was filled with smoke.

"Maybe Weiss rode in the death car," Busby said slowly. "And they spotted you talking with him — the others. He had money. He was coked up some. They got worried."

Burney nodded. "Ducky had a date in that flat," he said. "A fellow named Charles O'Leary rented it, three weeks ago. No one knows much about him. They never do, of course. That's out. But Weiss had a date, and he figured he wouldn't stay long. He kept the cab waiting. That black machine was on the job. Maybe they figured Ducky would make a break. They wanted to be sure. Or maybe it was just a split-up — and when those in the sedan got the high sign they just followed the cab to Twenty-third and went their own way."

Busby said: "That means Gratton was mobbed out. And Weiss was wise."

Burney shook his head. "It doesn't — not to me," he said.

Busby kept on frowning. "His killing doesn't help this girl any," he said. "They were in the old mob together. The police will be sure she knows something now. It makes an easier frame-up."

"If she *needs* to be framed," Burney said slowly.

The agency head grinned.

"You got a tough assignment, Don," he said. "And all for five hundred bucks that may be crooked money."

Don said: "I went over to that Park Avenue apartment. The switchboard girl who took the call is a bright kid. The bank that Gratton played with when he wasn't shuffling cards has offered a nice reward. So she turned in the woman she thought was Marion Drance. Jake Denton went up and spotted her right away. That was how they got wise to Clara."

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Busby said: "All right — but why did she give us the job? Suppose she'd just sat tight?"

Burney shrugged. "They'd have got her anyway. She can prove she was trying to turn up Gratton's killer. That won't hurt her case any. If I could get track of Gratton's movements, after he left her —"

Busby said: "And *if* he left her."

"He did." Don smiled a little. "He acted sore in the elevator. The doorman said it was a nice evening, and Gratton said: 'What of it?' And right there he drops out of sight until eleven ten. That was at seven thirty-five. The phone call came through at eight three. He's called Clara before, and the phone girl is sure it was his voice. He had a rather peculiar tone. She said he acted as though he were pretty mad."

Busby lighted a cigar. "What was her idea in telling you he took her to the theatre — at first."

Burney said: "Maybe she didn't want me to know they had a scrap. She hadn't told me about the phone call then. She just wanted me to think that Gratton was a good guy, and she wanted his killers caught. She knew her name would be connected with his. Then, when I bluffed and said I'd talked with Ducky Weiss, she got scared and came through."

"Why?" Busby asked.

Don Burney leaned forward.

"Weiss had been close to Gratton that night. There was something up. Clara knew it."

Busby said: "How do you know Weiss had been close to Gratton?

Burney took the envelope from hi pocket, showed the few threads to th agency head.

"Pinched them from Weiss's suit – last night. Went over to the morgue Talked with Jackson, over there. Go a good look at the body. And ther were two little threads — in his fin gernails. The police missed them – they weren't looking for them. I tool them down to Ed Carew, and he pu them under the microscope. The were just like the ones I'd pinche from Ducky's suit. I got them fron fingernails on each hand just as thougl Gratton had grabbed Weiss, shake him, maybe."

Busby took his feet off his desk stared at Burney, and said grimly "And Weiss is rubbed out, finished."

"It makes the deal tough," Don said. "Clara's still alive, but I don' think she'll talk. She's got guts. I tol Ducky that Gratton'd left her tw hundred grand. That's the bunk. Th will reads that she gets twenty-fiv grand. Ducky took it big. But wha his next move would have been – that's a guess."

"Or maybe he knew what she'd ge and was just kidding you."

Burney grinned. "It was one of hi last jokes, then," he said.

The agency head said slowly "What next, Don?"

The phone bell rang. Busby lifte the receiver, said "Hello" and hande the phone over to Burney. Jake Den ton's voice said:

"That you, Don — just wanted t

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tell you we turned Clara loose five minutes ago. Gave her an escort to her apartment. She's all broken up over Ducky's departure, but she won't admit it. Anything new?"

Burney said: "Not a thing. You pulled a boner, letting her loose, Jake."

Denton chuckled. "If we want her we'll grab her again," he replied. "And if someone else wants her, maybe that'll help."

"They won't want her — not until she gets the twenty-five grand," Burney said. "Thanks for calling, Jake."

Denton spoke cheerfully. "Still think she was framed, eh?"

Don Burney grinned down at the phone mouthpiece.

"She's our client," he reminded. "Didn't she come to us, pay us coin to get Gratton's killer?"

The Headquarters detective chuckled hoarsely. He said with irony:

"And are you going to get the killer?"

Burney said: "I'll give you a ring — when I do."

Jake Denton swore. "I'm forty-four," he said. "But I'll still be able to hear at sixty."

He hung up. Burney handed the phone back to the agency head.

"He's a great kidder," Don said. "And a pretty good dick, too."

Busby got his feet up on the desk again and watched the rain trickle down the window pane. He said slowly:

"Watch yourself, Don — they didn't hesitate to finish Weiss. And Gratton. If you go after that girl —"

Don Burney got to his feet slowly. He smiled at the agency head. It was a hard smile.

"I won't carry an umbrella," he said quietly. "But I'll keep my rubbers on, Chief."

He went from the office and had a bite to eat and a cup of coffee. When he went outside again it was raining harder. He turned up the collar of his light coat and walked eastward.

"Park Avenue's a nice spot — on a rainy night," he breathed to himself.

Clara Haines looked tired. Her blue eyes were dull and circles showed beneath them. The make-up on her face was splotched, and the cupid bow of her lips was not so perfect as it had been when Burney had last seen her. She smoked a cigarette with fingers that trembled when she lifted it to her lips.

"They're just playing with you, Clara," Burney said. "There's no chance of you getting clear. Give me the whole truth."

When she smiled she looked pretty bad. She shook her head.

"I gave it to you straight," she said. "They framed me. Ducky was in on it. They were afraid of him — the new mob he worked with — and they got him to that flat and gave him the works."

Burney said: "All right — and maybe they'll be afraid of you, too."

She sat stiffly on the divan. Her eyes slitted on his.

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"They can't — I don't know anything that can hurt them." Her voice was dull.

Burney said quietly: "That's a lie, Clara. How did they get wise to the fact that you had Gratton pretty well hooked, that he liked you? How did they know that by bumping him off you'd get the coin you probably will get — and probably will have to split with them?"

She jumped to her feet, tossed her cigarette towards the small open fireplace across the living room. She said fiercely:

"Now you cut that out, Don Burney! Cut it out! You're just a hired dick and I can call the agency off any time!"

Burney said: "Like hell you can. You started something, kid — and you can't stop it like that. The Force knows I'm working this case and if they know you framed us, tried to use us, I'd be a laughingstock. This is my job and it's going to be a good one."

She laughed bitterly. "You make pretty speeches," she sneered. "But I don't have to listen to them."

Burney rose from the chair he'd been sitting in and said grimly:

"Listen to this one, Clara. I told you I'd talked with Ducky before I came over here. That was true. Well, I talked with him again. Down in a speakeasy just off First Avenue. I had a drink with him. Fifteen minutes later — maybe a little more than that — he was dead."

She kept her eyes narrowed on his. She lighted another cigarette, and her fingers were steadier now. She said:

"Yeah — well, what of it?"

Burney said: "I'll tell you what you did, Clara. And then I'm going to call Jake Denton and let him take you away."

Her face was pale; she faced him with her arms at her sides. She didn't speak.

"You had that twenty-five grand coming to you — and you knew it. Gratton was fed up — he was walking out on you. You figured he'd change his mind about the coin. So you spilled the works to Ducky Weiss. You framed the thing between you. Ducky needed help. I don't know where Gratton went when he left here. But he had some drinks. Maybe he went several places. Ducky or the others picked him up and trailed along. They caught him on Forty-eighth and they took a big chance. They let loose with a submachine gun from a fast car. They got away with it. You framed the phone call — but you made it a tough one on yourself. That was nice, Clara — because in the end you knew they wouldn't get anything on you —"

She said wildly: "I tell you it was Roger's voice! He called me. I didn't frame it. That's a lie!"

Burney said grimly: "That fake phone call gave you a good reason to call the agency — you needed protection. But what you were after was Gratton's coin — and you were going to split with Weiss. Someone in the mob got yellow. The police had pulled in Weiss right away. They may

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have thought he had squealed. They may have figured he *might* squeal in a day or so. So they silenced him — and made a break for it."

She said in a strained voice: "That's a lie, Burney — a lie! I never did it."

Don Burney spoke in a low, hard tone.

"All right. But get this, Clara — you'll be next to get the dose. Why do you think the police turned you loose?"

"They didn't have anything on me," she said. "I swear they didn't."

Burney smiled coldly. "That's just half the truth," he said. "They turned you loose so they can tag you. They know you're slated to get it in the back — and they're after the others. You'll be out of things. If you're not they'll get you through the others. That's why they turned you loose."

Her voice was weaker, hoarse. She dropped into a chair that faced him. She said:

"If they get me it's because —"

Her lips closed. She sat staring at him.

Burney said: "It's because you know too much — and they know the police are wise. The game went wrong. We didn't fall for the murder-by-mistake idea. Even the police didn't fall for it. Know why?"

She shook her head, staring at him with her blue eyes. Burney said:

"Because Joe Riley was yelping that way too much. Because we knew at the agency that Gratton had him busted, and we knew that Riley didn't want anyone turned up."

She said scornfully: "What difference would it make? Riley hated Gratton — but Gratton was dead. Why would Riley care about the turn-up?"

Burney smiled. "Because he knew Gratton was going to get the dose," he said slowly. "He knew that, Clara. He wasn't a damn' bit surprised."

Fear held her. He could see it in her eyes, watch it twist her body. She started to speak, but no words came.

Burney said: "If you don't come through I'm going to turn you over to Denton. And then I'm going to Joe Riley."

She said: "No — no!" Her voice was almost a scream.

He shrugged. "You paid us to get the killer of Roger Gratton. I'm going to do it, Clara. And when he burns for the job you'll be doing a life stretch in the ladies' Big House."

She covered her face with her hands. He waited for her to speak. There was a long silence, and then she said in a voice barely audible:

"You're wrong of it, Burney — all wrong. I've got an out. Give me a break — you'll get credit. I've got an out."

He said: "Yeah — tell me."

She rose wearily. "You've got to go with me, Burney. You've got to — downtown."

He smiled grimly. "Do I look that way?" he asked.

She said in a desperate voice: "You've *got* to, I tell you! You'll get what you want — and I'll get my out."

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He shook his head. "You'll get dead," he stated.

Her eyes met his. "Burney," she said, "I swear I'm giving it to you straight. There's a package for me — downtown. I didn't know that Ducky was out of things, when they turned me loose —"

Burney said: "Careful — Jake told me you were all busted up about it."

She looked him squarely in the eyes. "He lied," she said. "They never told me a thing. I got a call, ten minutes ago. There's a package for me. It's mine — and it's an out. I was told that Weiss was gunned out —"

She stopped. Don spoke grimly. "All right, let's go, Clara. I'll have a rod on you all the time. You'll be the first woman I ever turned lead on — but I'll do it if you trick me."

She said in a steadier voice: "Let's go —"

The cab swayed down First Avenue. Rain slashed against the glass; the tires splashed through the water on the street. Burney sat on the left of Clara Haines, his right-hand fingers closed over the butt of the automatic in his coat pocket. She leaned back in the seat, swayed with the cab. Her eyes were closed; she spoke in a toneless voice.

"You came at us too hard, Burney. But I wasn't in the deal. I hadn't seen Ducky for two years, not since Pittsburgh, until I ran into him a few months ago in a night club. I tried to lose him, but he tagged me to the apartment. He laid off for a while, but he knew what was going on. Then he got broke. I gave him money — again and again."

Burney nodded. He didn't speak. The taxi was at Thirty-second Street, going south. Gusts of wind rocked it. The girl said:

"I was losing Gratton — and I knew it. He gambled a lot, and he carried money with him. Pretty big sums. Grand notes, and stuff like that. He'd show it to me. But he was getting tighter, see? I was pretty broke, myself. But I played square, Burney — I swear I did!"

Burney said: "It sounds better this way. You put Ducky wise, eh?"

She shivered. "He sent for me three days ago. He had found a speak where Gratton did his drinking. He had dinner and drinks, and then he went on to his game. He never drank while he gambled. Weiss said I was to call him when Gratton had money with him for a game — big money. I didn't call. But three days ago he said they were going to finish Roger and frame me, if I didn't call them. He said if I called they'd dope him, drug him. They'd only take the money. That was all. He swore to that."

Burney said: "You fool — so you called him?"

She said with half-opened eyes: "I wasn't a fool. I know Weiss. And Gratton was quitting me. The night he was killed he had nineteen thousand-dollar bills with him. He showed them to me, joked about it. He'd been winning steadily, for several

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nights. Not in big games. He wasn't a big-time gambler. Ducky knew the police wouldn't figure it a money kill. I called. And he framed me. He made Gratton talk over the phone to me — made him say those words —"

Her voice broke. Burney said:

"A money kill. How'd they get him? How do you know what they did?"

She said fiercely: "I met Weiss, late the night of the murder. I was scared. Weiss and Jay Moran, and one other of the old mob. They got a gun next to Gratton on Fiftieth Street, just off Sixth. They got him in a cab — he had brains enough not to fight. They took him downtown and got through that call. They kept him out of sight until eleven o'clock. They split up and Weiss rode in a cab with Gratton. They timed it right — Weiss put him out in Forty-eighth and told him to walk towards Sixth. Gratton was sober; he tried to argue with Ducky. But Weiss shoved him out. Then Jay Moran got him from another car — and they got clear —"

Her voice was hoarse. Burney said grimly:

"A money kill — and a frame-up for you. With you getting scared and calling the agency as a bluff. And Weiss knowing that Gratton looked like Charlie Laye, and that Laye was getting careless about coming back into that district."

She said tonelessly: "And he knew that Riley had a beat close by — and hated Gratton. He knew Riley wouldn't work too hard —"

The cab swung around a corner, slowed down. Burney said:

"Gratton got that thread stuff in his fingernails when he tried to stop Weiss from shoving him out of the cab."

Her eyes met his. She said harshly: "I didn't want him dead, Burney. I tried to save him. But I'm broke. Ducky swore he'd plant my share here — four grand, or better. I didn't want it — until now. It'll get me away. Give me a break, Burney — let me free. Jay and the others got Ducky. They'll get me —"

Don Burney said very quietly: "Go on in — and get it. I'll wait."

The cab driver opened the door. The girl slipped out. Burney stared at the entrance beyond the curtain of rain. It was the same place where he had had his last talk with Ducky.

He lighted a cigarette with his left hand. A door slammed. Burney muttered to himself:

"He was a rat if he left that coin for her. *If* he left it —"

Let her go free? He couldn't figure that. They had threatened to get Roger Gratton if she hadn't put them wise. That would have been money for her — the money he had willed her. But she had tried to protect Gratton. Perhaps she had loved him.

He breathed grimly: "One little streak of decency in her —"

The scream came faintly from the brick house. He was out of the cab in a flash. As he ran towards the iron door she screamed again. He was conscious of a car turning the corner.

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The cab driver was swearing hoarsely. The sound of a shot reached him.

There was a lock on the gate. He used one bullet to smash it. Then he was inside. A figure struck at him — he fired with the gun muzzle low. A blow sent him against a wall, then the man was down on the floor, groaning.

The bar was down the hall, but the stairs were close. He went up them with his gun arm held high. There were no more screams. There was only a faint light on the first floor. A door was half-open. He kicked it with his right foot. Two shots crashed from within the room. His left arm sent pain through his body in one fierce stab, then was numb. He dropped to his knees.

He fired once at the figure he saw move near a window — a man figure. From the stairs a shot sent a bullet into the wall above his head. Plaster crackled downward. Once more a gun cracked in the room, but he felt no pain. There were shouts from below.

He swore bitterly, crawled forward, into the room. The faint light from the hall showed him the color of metal. There was a sharp click from the far side of the room.

Burney fired for the fourth time. A man swore terribly. The figure near the window swayed, coughing. Then the man crashed to the floor.

On the stairs men were fighting. It stopped abruptly. Jake Denton's voice said:

"All right — on up!"

Burney got to his feet and leaned against the wall. A flashlight struck his face. Denton was at his side. He gritted:

"What the hell is going —"

Burney pressed his right wrist against his left arm, just below the shoulder. He said huskily:

"Inside — it's all right."

He followed the detective in. The girl was lying face downward. The bullet had reached her heart, going in through the back. But she'd seen someone first. She'd screamed.

The others came into the room. Denton said:

"We trailed you down, Burney — we were watching the girl. We took care of the men on the stairs."

Burney nodded. The Headquarters detective slanted the beam from the light on the face of the man near the window. He said slowly:

"Jay Moran!"

The beam moved. There were bills in Moran's left-hand fingers — thousand-dollar bills. Burney said slowly:

"She gave it to me straight — finally. Ducky was square with her, at that. But Moran came back, waited. He knew she'd come — and he didn't know where the split was planted."

He slipped his automatic in a pocket.

Denton said: "Say, listen, Don —"

Burney nodded. "Sure," he cut in. "You'll get the dope. But Moran got me in the arm."

Denton swore. "We got first-aid stuff in the car. You need a drink."

Don Burney smiled a little. "Yeah," he said slowly. "Well, let's go downstairs. That's the place to get it."

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H. G. Wells has been called "one of the titans of modern English literature." Whatever posterity may decide, he was certainly one of the most versatile writers who ever lived. Serious novelist, historian, scientific writer, and fantasist extraordinary, he averaged more than a book a year from 1895 until his death in 1946. Mr. Wells's serious novels included such magnificent books as ANN VERONICA, TONO-BUNGAY, *and* THE HISTORY OF MR. POLLY; *his work in history and science, such monumental achievements as* THE OUTLINE OF HISTORY, *and (in collaboration with his son and Julian Huxley)* THE SCIENCE OF LIFE; *and his science fiction, such classics as* THE TIME MACHINE, THE INVISIBLE MAN, *and* WHEN THE SLEEPER AWAKES. *All told, H. G. Wells's life was one of inspiring courage, in the face of ill health, and spectacular success, in the face of devastating criticism. Early in the 20th century, with the publication of* KIPPS: THE STORY OF A SIMPLE SOUL, *Mr. Wells discovered that he possessed a rich store of humor. Here is a short tale — a humorous crime story written even before* KIPPS *— which might be said to have anticipated, in respect to the lighter side of Mr. Wells's work, "the shape of things to come" . . .*

A DEAL IN OSTRICHES

by H. G. WELLS

"TALKING OF THE PRICES OF BIRDS, I've seen an ostrich that cost three hundred pounds," said the Taxidermist, recalling his youth of travel. "Three hundred pounds!" He looked at me over his spectacles. "I've seen another that was refused at four.

"No," he said, "it wasn't any fancy points. They was just plain ostriches. A little off color, too — owing to dietary. And there wasn't any particular restriction of the demand either. You'd have thought five ostriches would have ruled cheap on an East Indiaman. But the point was, one of 'em had swallowed a diamond.

"The chap it got it off was Sir Mohini Padishah, a tremendous swell, a Piccadilly swell, you might say, up to the neck of him, and then a big ugly head and a whopping turban, with this diamond in it. The blessed bird pecked suddenly and had it, and when the chap made a fuss it realized it had done wrong, I suppose, and went and mixed itself with the others to preserve its *incog.* It all happened in a minute. I was among the first to

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arrive, and there was this heathen going over his gods, and two sailors and the man who had charge of the birds laughing fit to split. It was a rummy way of losing a jewel, come to think of it. The man in charge hadn't been about just at the moment, so that he didn't know which bird it was. Clean lost, you see. I didn't feel half sorry, to tell you the truth. The beggar had been swaggering over his blessed diamond ever since he came aboard.

"A thing like that goes from stem to stern of a ship in no time. Everyone was talking about it. Padishah went below to hide his feelings. At dinner the captain kind of jeered at him about it, and he got very excited. He turned round and talked into my ear. He would not buy the birds; he would have his diamond. He demanded his rights as a British subject. His diamond must be found. He was firm upon that. He would appeal to the House of Lords. The man in charge of the birds was one of those wooden-headed chaps you can't get a new idea into anyhow. He refused any proposal to interfere with the birds by way of medicine. His instructions were to feed them so-and-so and treat them so-and-so, and it was as much as his place was worth not to feed them so-and-so and treat them so-and-so. Padishah had wanted a stomach-pump — though you can't do that to a bird, you know. This Padishah was full of bad law, like most of these blessed Bengalis, and talked of having a lien on the birds, and so forth. But an old boy, who said his son was a London barrister, argued that what a bird swallowed became *ipso facto* part of the bird, and that Padishah's only remedy lay in an action for damages, and even then it might be possible to show contributory negligence. He hadn't any right of way about an ostrich that didn't belong to him. That upset Padishah extremely, the more so as most of us expressed an opinion that that was the reasonable view. There wasn't any lawyer aboard to settle the matter, so we all talked pretty free. At last, after Aden, it appears that he came round to the general opinion, and went privately to the man in charge and made an offer for all five ostriches.

"The next morning there was a fine shindy at breakfast. The man hadn't any authority to deal with the birds, and nothing on earth would induce him to sell; but it seems he told Padishah that a Eurasian named Potter had already made him an offer, and on that Padishah denounced Potter before us all. But I think the most of us thought it rather smart of Potter, and I know that when Potter said he'd wired at Aden to London to buy the birds, and would have an answer at Suez, I cursed pretty richly at a lost opportunity.

"At Suez, Padishah gave way to tears — actual wet tears — when Potter became the owner of the birds, and offered him two hundred and fifty right off for the five, being more than two hundred per cent on what Potter had given. Potter said he'd be hanged if he parted with a feather of them —

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that he meant to kill them off one by one and find the diamond; but afterwards, thinking it over, he relented a little. He was a gambling hound, was this Potter, a little queer at cards, and this kind of prize-packet business must have suited him down to the ground. Anyhow, he offered, for a lark, to sell the birds separately to separate people, by auction, at a starting price of £80 for a bird. But one, he said, he meant to keep for luck.

"You must understand this diamond was a valuable one — a little chap, a diamond merchant, who was with us, had put it at three or four thousand when Padishah had shown it to him — and this idea of an ostrich gamble caught on. Now it happened that I'd been having a few talks on general subjects with the man who looked after these ostriches, and quite incidentally he'd said one of the birds was ailing, and he fancied it had indigestion. It had one feather in its tail almost all white, by which I knew it, and so when, next day, the auction started with it, I capped Padishah's eighty-five by ninety. I fancy I was a bit too sure and eager with my bid, and some of the others spotted the fact that I was in the know. And Padishah went for that particular bird like an irresponsible lunatic. At last the diamond merchant got it for £175, and Padishah said £180 just after the hammer came down — so Potter declared. At any rate the merchant secured it, and there and then he got a gun and shot it. Potter made a Hades of a fuss because he said it would injure the sale of the other three, and Padishah, of course, behaved like an idiot; but all of us were very much excited. I can tell you I was precious glad when that dissection was over, and no diamond had turned up — precious glad. I'd gone to one-forty on that particular bird myself.

"Potter declined to go on with the auction until it was understood that the goods could not be delivered until the sale was over. The little diamond merchant wanted to argue that the case was exceptional, and as the discussion ran pretty even, the thing was postponed until the next morning. We had a lively dinner-table that evening, I can tell you, but in the end Potter got his way, since it would stand to reason he would be safer if he stuck to all the birds, and we owed him some consideration for his sportsmanlike behavior. And the old gentleman whose son was a lawyer said it was very doubtful if, when a bird had been opened and the diamond recovered, it ought not to be handed back to the proper owner. I remember I suggested it came under the laws of treasure-trove — which was really the truth of the matter. There was a hot argument, and we settled it was certainly foolish to kill the bird on board the ship. Then the old gentleman tried to make out the sale was a lottery and illegal, and appealed to the captain; but Potter said he sold the birds *as* ostriches. He didn't want to sell any diamonds, he said, and didn't offer that as an inducement. The three birds he put up, to the best of his

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knowledge and belief, did *not* contain a diamond. It was in the one he kept — so he hoped.

"Prices ruled high next day. The fact that now there were four chances instead of five of course caused a rise. The blessed birds averaged £227, and, oddly enough, this Padishah didn't secure one of 'em — not one. He made too much shindy, and when he ought to have been bidding he was talking about liens, and, besides, Potter was a bit down on him. One fell to a quiet little officer chap, another to the little diamond merchant, and the third was syndicated by the engineers. And then Potter seemed suddenly sorry for having sold them, and said he'd flung away a clear thousand pounds, and that he always had been a fool, but when I went and had a bit of a talk to him, with the idea of getting him to hedge on his last chance, I found he'd already sold the bird he'd reserved to a political chap that was on board, a chap who'd been studying Indian morals and social questions in his vacation. That last was the three-hundred-pound bird. Well, they landed three of the blessed creatures at Brindisi — though the old gentleman said it was a breach of the Customs regulations — and Potter and Padishah landed too. The Hindoo seemed half-mad as he saw his blessed diamond going this way and that, so to speak. He kept on saying he'd get an injunction — he had injunction on the brain — and giving his name and address to the chaps who'd bought the birds, so that they'd know where to send the diamond. None of them wanted his name and address, and none of them would give their own. It was a fine row, I can tell you — on the platform. They all went off by different trains. I came on to Southampton, and there I saw the last of the birds, as I came ashore; it was the one the engineers had bought, and it was standing up near the bridge, in a kind of crate, and looking as leggy and silly a setting for a valuable diamond as ever you saw — if it *was* a setting for a valuable diamond.

"*How did it end?* Oh! like that. Well — perhaps. Yes, there's one more thing that may throw light on it. A week or so after landing I was down Regent Street doing a bit of shopping, and who should I see arm-in-arm and having a purple time of it but Padishah and Potter. If you come to think of it ——

"Yes. *I've* thought that. Only, you see, there's no doubt the diamond was real. And Padishah was an eminent Hindoo. I've seen his name in the papers — often. But whether the bird swallowed the diamond is certainly another matter, as you say."

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Confusion worse confounded.

— JOHN MILTON

Exactly one year ago — in the November 1950 issue of EQMM — we gave you a report on the State of Criminological Criticism in these United States. We selected five recognized and accredited reviewers, analyzed their round-ups of the best detective-crime novels of the previous year, 1949, and presented the two astounding, but utterly incontrovertible, results of our study. Those two results were as follows:

(1) Not a single mystery novel published in 1949 was chosen as one of the best of the year by all five *critics;*

(2) Not a single mystery novel published in 1949 was chosen as one of the best of the year by even four *of the five critics.*

In other words, the highest number of votes any mystery novel of 1949 received from five authoritative critics was three.

Last year we made the positive statement that it did not seem too much to expect all five critics — acknowledged to be among the most outstanding in the country, if not in the world — to expect all five critics to agree on at least one *of the best mysteries of* any *year.*

Well, what happened in the annual round-ups of 1950? Did the mystery novels published during 1950 achieve a better record of unanimity? We determined to repeat our investigations.

If it had been possible, we would have used the round-ups of the same five critics. But unfortunately we were able to use only two of the original five — Anthony Boucher of "The New York Times" and Drexel Drake of the "Chicago Sunday Tribune." Edward Dermot Doyle of the "San Francisco Chronicle" rejoined the U. S. Armed Services, but his place was taken by Lenore Glen Offord — so we did the next best thing, we used Miss Offord's "year's end" nominations. James Sandoe's column in the "Chicago Sun-Times" was mysteriously and unaccountably discontinued; in Sandoe's place we used the annual "best books" selected by August Derleth of "The Capital Times" of Madison, Wisconsin. "The Saturday Review of Literature" failed to publish any round-up of the year's best mysteries — "this was the most unkindest cut of all"; to substitute for "The Saturday Review," we chose the favorites of Dorothy B. Hughes of the "Los Angeles Daily News" — for her 1950 reviewing Miss Hughes deservedly won the coveted "Edgar" awarded annually by

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the Mystery Writers of America to the top mystery critic of the year.

So, with a nearly new panel of experts, we proceeded to analyze the "Best Mysteries of 1950." And would you believe it — THE RESULTS FOR 1950 WERE PRECISELY THE SAME AS THEY HAD BEEN FOR 1949!

Again, exactly as in the previous year, not a single mystery novel published in 1950 was chosen by *all five* critics!

Again, exactly as in the previous year, not a single mystery novel published in 1950 was chosen by *even four* of the five critics!

Again, exactly as in the previous year, no mystery novel of 1950 received more than three votes out of a possible five.

Again, we cannot help wondering: What price criticism? Again, we cannot help asking: How is it possible for five reputable and competent critics not to agree on a single book as one of the best of the year?

The prosecution rests . . .

But fair warning: we'll be back again next year!

ALL AT ONCE, NO ALICE

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

IT WAS OVER SO QUICKLY I ALMOST thought something had been left out, but I guess he'd been doing it long enough to know his business. The only way I could tell for sure it was over was when I heard him say: "You may kiss the bride." But then, I'd never gone through it before.

We turned and pecked at each other, a little bashful because they were watching us.

He and the motherly-looking woman who had been a witness — I guess she was his housekeeper — stood there smiling benevolently, and also a little tiredly. The clock said one fifteen. Then he shook hands with the two of us and said, "Good luck to both of you," and she shook with us too and said, "I wish you a lot of happiness."

We shifted from the living room, where it had taken place, out into the front hall, a little awkwardly. Then he held the screen door open and we moved from there out onto the porch.

On the porch step Alice nudged me and whispered, "You forgot something."

I didn't even know how much I was supposed to give him. I took out two singles and held them in one hand, then I took out a five and held that in the other. Then I went back toward him all flustered and said, "I — I guess

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you thought I was going to leave without remembering this."

I reached my hand down to his and brought it back empty. He kept right on smiling, as if this happened nearly every time too, the bridegroom forgetting like that. It was only after I turned away and rejoined her that I glanced down at my other hand and saw which it was I'd given him. It was the five. That was all right; five thousand of them couldn't have paid him for what he'd done for me, the way I felt about it.

We went down their front walk and got into the car. The lighted doorway outlined them both for a minute. They raised their arms and said, "Good night."

"Good night, and much obliged," I called back. "Wait'll they go in," I said in an undertone to Alice, without starting the engine right away.

As soon as the doorway had blacked out, we turned and melted together on the front seat, and this time we made it a real kiss. "Any regrets?" I whispered to her very softly.

"It must have been awful before I was married to you," she whispered back. "How did I ever stand it so long?"

I don't think we said a word all the way in to Michianopolis. We were both too happy. Just the wind and the stars and us. And a couple of cigarettes.

We got to the outskirts around two thirty, and by three were all the way in downtown. We shopped around for a block or two. "This looks like a nice hotel," I said finally. I parked outside and we went in.

I think the first hotel was called the Commander. I noticed that the bellhops let us strictly alone; didn't bustle out to bring in our bags or anything.

I said to the desk man, "We'd like one of your best rooms and bath."

He gave me a sort of rueful smile, as if to say, "You should know better than that." . . . "I only wish I had something to give you," was the way he put it.

"All filled up?" I turned to her and murmured, "Well, we'll have to try some place else."

He overheard me. "Excuse me, but did you come in without making reservations ahead?"

"Yes, we just drove in now. Why?"

He shook his head compassionately at my ignorance. "I'm afraid you're going to have a hard time finding a room in any of the hotels tonight."

"Why? They can't all be filled up."

"There's a three-day convention of the Knights of Balboa being held here. All the others started sending their overflow to us as far back as Monday evening, and our own last vacancy went yesterday noon."

The second one was called the Stuyvesant, I think. "There must be something in a city this size," I said when we came out of there. "We'll keep looking until we find it."

I didn't bother noticing the names of the third and fourth. We couldn't turn around and go all the way back to our original point of departure —

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it would have been mid-morning before we reached it — and there was nothing that offered suitable accommodations between; just filling stations, roadside lunchrooms, and detached farmsteads.

Besides she was beginning to tire. She refused to admit it, but it was easy to tell. It worried me.

The fifth place was called the Royal. It was already slightly less first-class than the previous ones had been; we were running out of them now. Nothing wrong with it, but just a little seedier and older.

I got the same answer at the desk, but this time I wouldn't take it. The way her face drooped when she heard it was enough to make me persist. I took the night clerk aside out of her hearing.

"Listen, you've got to do something for me, I don't care what it is," I whispered fiercely. "We've just driven all the way from Lake City and my wife's all in. I'm not going to drag her around to another place tonight."

Then as his face continued impassive, "If you can't accommodate both of us, find some way of putting her up at least. I'm willing to take my own chances, go out and sleep in the car or walk around the streets for the night."

"Wait a minute," he said, hooking his chin, "I think I could work out something like that for you. I just thought of something. There's a little bit of a dinky room on the top floor. Ordinarily it's not used as a guest room at all, just as a sort of storeroom. You couldn't possibly both use it, because there's only a single-width cot in it; but if you don't think your wife would object, I'd be glad to let her have it, and I think you might still be able to find a room for yourself at the Y. They don't admit women, and most of these Knights have brought their wives with them."

I took a look at her pretty, drawn face. "Anything, anything," I said gratefully.

He still had his doubts. "You'd better take her up and let her see it first."

A colored boy came with us, with a passkey. On the way up I explained it to her. She gave me a rueful look, but I could see she was too tired even to object as much as she felt she should have. "Ah, that's mean," she murmured. "Our first night by ourselves."

"It's just for tonight. We'll drive on right after breakfast. It's important that you get some rest, hon. You can't fool me, you can hardly keep your eyes open any more."

She tucked her hand consolingly under my arm. "I don't mind if you don't. It'll give me something to look forward to, seeing you in the morning."

The bellboy led us along a quiet, green-carpeted hall, and around a turn, scanning numbers on the doors. He stopped three down from the turn, on the right-hand side, put his key in. "This is it here, sir." The number was 1006.

The man at the desk hadn't exag-

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gerated. The room itself was little better than an alcove, long and narrow. I suppose two could have gotten into it; but it would have been a physical impossibility for two to sleep in it the way it was fitted up. It had a cot that was little wider than a shelf.

To give you an idea how narrow the room was, the window was narrower than average, and yet not more than a foot of wall-strip showed on either side of its frame. In other words it took up nearly the width of one entire side of the room.

I suppose I could have sat up in the single armchair all night and slept, or tried to, that way; but as long as there was a chance of getting a horizontal bed at the Y, why not be sensible about it? She agreed with me in this.

"Think you can go this, just until the morning?" I asked her, and the longing way she was eyeing that miserable cot gave me the answer. She was so tired, anything would have looked good to her right then.

We went down again and I told him I'd take it. I had the bellboy take her bag out of the car and bring it in, and the desk clerk turned the register around for her to sign.

She poised the inked pen and flashed me a tender look just as she was about to sign. "First time I've used it," she breathed. I looked over her shoulder and watched her trace *Mrs. James Cannon* along the lined space. The last entry above hers was *A. Krumbake, and wife.* I noticed it because it was such a funny name.

The desk clerk had evidently decided by now that we were fairly desirable people. "I'm terribly sorry I couldn't do more for you," he said. "It's just for this one night. By tomorrow morning a lot of them'll be leaving."

I went up with her a second time, to see that she was made as comfortable as she could be under the circumstances. But then there was nothing definitely wrong with the room except its tininess, and the only real hardship was our temporary separation.

I tipped the boy for bringing up her bag, and then I tipped him a second time for going and digging up a nice, fluffy quilt for her at my request — not to spread over her but to spread on top of the mattress and soften it up a little. Those cots aren't as comfortable as regular beds by a darned sight. But she was so tired I was hoping she wouldn't notice the difference.

Then after he'd thanked me for the double-header he'd gotten out of it, and left the room, I helped her off with her coat and hung it up for her, and even got down on my heels and undid the straps of her little sandals, so she wouldn't have to bend over and go after them herself. Then we kissed a couple of times and told each other all about it, and I backed out the door.

The last I saw of her that night she was sitting on the edge of that cot in there, her shoeless feet raised to it and partly tucked under her, like a little girl. She raised one hand, wriggled the

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fingers at me in goodnight as I reluctantly eased the door closed.

"Until tomorrow, sweetheart," she called gently, when there was a crack of opening left.

"Until tomorrow."

The night was as still around us as if it were holding its breath. The latch went *cluck*, and there we were on opposite sides of it.

The bellboy had taken the car down with him just now after he'd checked her in, and I had to wait out there a minute or two for him to bring it back up again at my ring. I stepped back to the turn in the hall while waiting, to look at the frosted glass transom over her door; and short as the time was, her light was already out. She must have just shrugged off her dress, fallen back flat, and pulled the coverings up over her.

Poor kid, I thought, with a commiserating shake of my head. The glass elevator panel flooded with light and I got in the car. The one bellhop doubled for liftman after twelve.

"I guess she'll be comfortable," he said.

"She was asleep before I left the floor," I told him.

The desk man told me where the nearest branch of the Y was, and I took the car with me as the quickest way of getting over there at that hour. I had no trouble at all getting a room, and not a bad one at that for six bits.

I didn't phone her before going up, to tell her I'd gotten something for myself, because I knew by the way I'd seen that light go out she was fast asleep already, and it would have been unnecessarily cruel to wake her again.

I woke up at eight and again I didn't phone her, to find out how she was, because in the first place I was going right over there myself in a few more minutes, and in the second place I wanted her to get all the sleep she could before I got there.

I even took my time, showered and shaved up good, and drove over slowly, to make sure of not getting there any earlier than nine.

It was a beautiful day, with the sun as brand-new-looking as if it had never shone before; and I even stopped off and bought a gardenia for her to wear on the shoulder of her dress. I thought: I'll check her out of that depressing dump. We'll drive to the swellest restaurant in town, and she'll sit having orange juice and toast while I sit looking at her face.

I braked in front of the Royal, got out, and went in, lighting up the whole lobby the way I was beaming.

A different man was at the desk now, on the day shift, but I knew the number of her room so I rode right up without stopping. I got out at the tenth, went down the hall the way we'd been led last night — still green-carpeted but a little less quiet now — and around the turn.

When I came to the third door down, on the right-hand side — the door that had 1006 on it — I stopped and listened a minute to see if I could tell whether she was up yet or not. If she wasn't up yet, I was going back

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downstairs again, hang around in the lobby, and give her another half-hour of badly-needed sleep.

But she was up already. I could hear a sound in there as if she were brushing out her dress or coat with a stiff-bristled brush — *skish, skish, skish* — so I knocked, easy and loving, on the door with just three knuckles.

The *skish-skish-skish* broke off a minute, but then went right on again. But the door hadn't been tightly closed into the frame at all, and my knocking sent it drifting inward an inch or two. A whiff of turpentine or something like that nearly threw me over, but without stopping to distinguish what it was, I pushed the door the rest of the way in and walked in.

Then I pulled up short. I saw I had the wrong room.

There wasn't anything in it — no furniture, that is. Just bare floorboards, walls and ceiling. Even the light fixture had been taken down, and two black wires stuck out of a hole, like insect feelers, where it had been.

A man in spotted white overalls and peaked cap was standing on a step-ladder slapping a paint brush up and down the walls. *Skish-skish-splop!*

I grunted, "Guess I've got the wrong number," and backed out.

"Guess you must have, bud," he agreed, equally laconic, without even turning his head to see who I was.

I looked up at the door from the outside. Number 1006. But that was the number they'd given her, sure it was. I looked in a second time. Long and narrow, like an alcove. Not more than a foot of wall space on either side of the window frame.

Sure, this was the room, all right. They must have found out they had something better available after all, and changed her after I left last night. I said, "Where'd they put the lady that was in here, you got any idea?"

Skish-skish-skish. "I dunno, bud, you'll have to find out at the desk. It was empty when I come here to work at seven." *Skish-skish-splop!*

I went downstairs to the desk again, and I said, "Excuse me. What room have you got Mrs. Cannon in now?"

He looked up some chart or other they use, behind the scenes, then he came back and said, "We have no Mrs. Cannon here."

I pulled my face back. Then I thrust it forward again. "What's the matter with you?" I said curtly. "I came here with her myself last night. Better take another look."

He did. A longer one. Then he came back and said, "I'm sorry, there's no Mrs. Cannon registered here."

I knew there was nothing to get excited about; it would probably be straightened out in a minute or two; but it was a pain in the neck. I was very patient. After all, this was the first morning of my honeymoon. "Your night man was on duty at the time. It was about three this morning. He gave her 1006."

He looked that up too. "That's not in use," he said. "That's down for redecorating. It's been empty for —"

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"I don't care what it is. I tell you they checked my wife in there at three this morning, I went up with her myself! Will you quit arguing and find out what room she's in, for me? I don't want to stand here talking to you all day; I want to be with her."

"But I'm telling you, mister, the chart shows no one by that name."

"Then look in the register if you don't believe me. I watched her sign it myself."

People were standing around the lobby looking at me now, but I didn't care.

"It would be on the chart," he insisted. "It would have been transferred —" He ran the pad of his finger up the register page from bottom to top. Too fast, I couldn't help noticing: without a hitch, as if there were nothing to impede it. Then he went back a page and ran it up that, in the same streamlined way.

"Give it to me," I said impatiently. "I'll find it for you in a minute." I flung it around my way.

A. Krumbake, and wife stared at me. And then under that just a blank space all the way down to the bottom of the page. No more check-ins.

I could feel the pores of my face sort of closing up. That was what it felt like, anyway. Maybe it was just the process of getting pale. "She signed right under that name. It's been rubbed out."

"Oh, no, it hasn't," he told me firmly. "No one tampers with the register like that. People may leave, but their names stay on it."

Dazedly, I traced the ball of my finger back and forth across the white paper under that name, *Krumbake*. Smooth and unrubbed, its semi-glossy finish unimpaired by erasure. I held the page up toward the light and tried to squint through it, to see whether it showed thinner there, either from rubbing or some other means of eradication. It was all of the same even opacity.

I spoke in a lower voice now; I wasn't being impatient any more. "There's something wrong. Something wrong about this. I can't understand it. I saw her write it. I saw her sign it with my own eyes. I've known it was the right hotel all along, but even if I wasn't sure, this other name, this name above, would prove it to me. Krumbake. I remember it from last night. Maybe they changed her without notifying you down here."

"That wouldn't be possible; it's through me, down here, that all changes are made. It isn't that I don't know what room she's in; it's that there's absolutely no record of any such person ever having been at the hotel, so you see you must be mis —"

"Call the manager for me," I said hoarsely.

I stood there waiting by the onyx-topped desk until he came. I stood there very straight, very impassive, not touching the edge of the counter with my hands in any way, about an inch clear of it.

People were bustling back and forth, casually, normally, cheerily, behind me; plinking their keys down

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on the onyx; saying, "Any mail for me?"; saying, "I'll be in the coffee shop if I'm called." And something was already trying to make me feel a little cut off from them, a little set apart. As if a shadowy finger had drawn a ring around me where I stood, and mystic vapors were already beginning to rise from it, walling me off from my fellowmen.

I wouldn't let the feeling take hold of me — yet — but it was already there, trying to. I'd give an imperceptible shake of my head every once in a while and say to myself, "Things like this don't happen in broad daylight. It's just some kind of misunderstanding; it'll be cleared up presently."

The entrance, the lobby, had seemed so bright when I first came in, but I'd been mistaken. There were shadows lengthening in the far corners that only I could see. The gardenia I had for her was wilting.

The manager was no help at all. He tried to be, listened attentively, but then the most he could do was have the clerk repeat what he'd already done for me, look on the chart and look in the register. After all, details like that were in the hands of the staff. I simply got the same thing as before, only relayed through him now instead of direct from the desk man. "No, there hasn't been any Mrs. Cannon here at any time."

"Your night man will tell you," I finally said in despair, "he'll tell you I brought her here. Get hold of him, ask him. He'll remember us."

"I'll call him down; he rooms right here in the house," he said. But then with his hand on the phone he stopped to ask again, "Are you quite sure it was this hotel, Mr. Cannon? He was on duty until six this morning, and I hate to wake him up unless you —"

"Bring him down," I said. "This is more important to me than his sleep. It's got to be cleared up." I wasn't frightened yet, out-and-out scared; just baffled, highly worried, and with a peculiar lost feeling.

He came down inside of five minutes. I knew him right away, the minute he stepped out of the car, in spite of the fact that other passengers had come down with him. I was so sure he'd be able to straighten it out that I took a step toward him without waiting for him to join us. If they noticed that, which was a point in favor of my credibility — my knowing him at sight like that — they gave no sign.

I said, "You remember me, don't you? You remember checking my wife into 1006 at three this morning, and telling me I'd have to go elsewhere?"

"No," he said with polite regret. "I'm afraid I don't."

I could feel my face go white as if a soundless bombshell of flour or talcum had just burst all over it. I put one foot behind me and set the heel down and stayed that way.

The manager asked him, "Well, did the gentleman stop at the desk perhaps, just to inquire, and then go elsewhere? Do you remember him at all, Stevens?"

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"No, I never saw him until now. It must have been some other hotel."

"But look at me; look at my face," I tried to say. But I guess I didn't put any voice into it, it was just lip-motion, because he didn't seem to hear.

The manager shrugged amiably, as if to say, "Well, that's all there is to it, as far as we're concerned."

I was breathing hard, fighting for self-control. "No. No, you can't close this matter. I dem — I ask you to give me one more chance to prove that I — that I — Call the night porter, the night bellboy that carried up her bag for her."

They were giving one another looks by now, as if I were some sort of crank.

"Listen, I'm in the full possession of my faculties, I'm not drunk, I wouldn't come in here like this if I weren't positive —"

The manager was going to try to pacify me and ease me out. "But don't you see you must be mistaken, old man? There's absolutely no record of it. We're very strict about those things. If any of my men checked a guest in without entering it on the chart of available rooms, and in the register, I'd fire him on the spot. Was it the Palace? Was it the Commander, maybe? Try to think now, you'll get it."

And with each soothing syllable, he led me a step nearer the entrance.

I looked up suddenly, saw that the desk had already receded a considerable distance behind us, and balked. "No, don't do this. This is no way to — Will you get that night-to-morning bellhop? Will you do that one more thing for me?"

He sighed, as if I were trying his patience sorely. "He's probably home sleeping. Just a minute; I'll find out."

It turned out he wasn't. They were so overcrowded and undermanned at the moment that instead of being at home he was sleeping right down in the basement, to save time coming and going. He came up in a couple of minutes, still buttoning the collar of his uniform. I knew him right away. He didn't look straight at me at first, but at the manager.

"Do you remember seeing this gentleman come here with a lady, at three this morning? Do you remember carrying her bag up to 1006 for her?"

Then he did look straight at me — and didn't seem to know me. "No, sir, Mr. DeGrasse."

The shock wasn't as great as the first time; it couldn't have been, twice in succession.

"Don't you remember that quilt you got for her, to spread over the mattress, and I gave you a second quarter for bringing it? You must remember that — dark blue, with little white flowers all over it —"

"No, sir, boss."

"But I know your face! I remember that scar just over your eyebrow. And — part your lips a little — that gold cap in front that shows every time you grin."

"No, sir, not me."

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My voice was curling up and dying inside my throat. "Then when you took me down alone with you, the last time, you even said, 'I guess she'll be comfortable' — " I squeezed his upper arm pleadingly. "Don't you remember? Don't you remember?"

"No, sir." This time he said it so low you could hardly hear it, as if his training wouldn't let him contradict me too emphatically, but on the other hand he felt obliged to stick to the facts.

I grabbed at the hem of my coat, bunched it up to emphasize the pattern and the color of the material. "Don't you know me by this?" Then I let my fingers trail helplessly down the line of my jaw. "Don't you know my face?"

He didn't answer any more, just shook his head each time.

"What're you doing this for? What're you trying to do to me? All of you?" The invisible fumes from that necromancer's ring, that seemed to cut me off from all the world, came swirling up thicker and thicker about me. My voice was strident with a strange new kind of fear, a fear I hadn't known since I was ten.

"You've got me rocky now! You've got me down! Cut it out, I say!"

They were starting to draw back little by little away from me, prudently widen the tight knot they had formed around me. I turned from one to the other, from bellhop to night clerk, night clerk to day clerk, day clerk to manager, and each one as I turned to him retreated slightly.

There was a pause, while I fought against this other, lesser kind of death that was creeping over me — this death called *strangeness*, this snapping of all the customary little threads of cause and effect that are our moorings at other times. Slowly they all drew back from me step by step, until I was left there alone, cut off.

Then the tension exploded. My voice blasted the quiet of the lobby. "I want my wife!" I yelled shatteringly. "Tell me what's become of her. What've you done with her? I came in here with her last night; you can't tell me I didn't. . . ."

They circled, maneuvered around me. I heard the manager say in a harried undertone, "I knew this was going to happen. I could have told you he was going to end up like this. George! Archer! Get him out of here fast!"

My arms were suddenly seized from behind and held. I threshed against the constriction, so violently both my legs flung up clear of the floor at one time, dropped back again, but I couldn't break it. There must have been two of them behind me.

The manager had come in close again, now that I was safely pinioned, no doubt hoping that his nearness would succeed in soft-pedaling the disturbance. "Now will you leave here quietly, or do you want us to call the police and turn you over to them?"

"You'd better call them anyway, Mr. DeGrasse," the day clerk put in. "I've run into this mental type before. He'll only come back in again

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the very minute your back's turned."

"No, I'd rather not, unless he forces me to. It's bad for the hotel. Look at the crowd collecting down here on the main floor already. Tchk! Tchk!"

He tried to reason with me. "Now listen, give me a break, will you? You don't look like the kind of a man who — Won't you please go quietly? If I have you turned loose outside, will you go away and promise not to come in here again?"

"*Ali-i-i-i-ice!*" I sent it baying harrowingly down the long vista of lobby, lounges, foyers. I'd been gathering it in me the last few seconds while he was speaking to me. I put my heart and soul into it. It should have shaken down the big old-fashioned chandeliers by the vibration it caused alone. My voice broke under the strain. A woman onlooker somewhere in the background bleated at the very intensity of it.

The manager hit himself between the eyes in consternation. "Oh, this is fierce! Hurry up, call an officer quick, get him out of here."

"See, what did I tell you?" the clerk said knowingly.

I got another chestful of air in, tore loose with it. "Somebody help me! You people standing around looking, isn't there one of you will help me? I brought my wife here last night; now she's gone and they're trying to tell me I never —"

A brown hand suddenly sealed my mouth, was as quickly withdrawn again at the manager's panic-stricken admonition. "George! Archer! Don't lay a hand on him. No rough stuff. Make us liable for damages afterwards, y'know."

Then I heard him and the desk man both give a deep breath of relief. "At last!" And I knew a cop must have come in behind me.

The grip on my arms behind my back changed, became single instead of double, one arm instead of two. But I didn't fight against it.

Suddenly I was very passive, unresistant. Because suddenly I had a dread of arrest, confinement. I wanted to preserve my freedom of movement more than all else, to try to find her again. If they threw me in a cell, or put me in a straitjacket, how could I look for her, how could I ever hope to get at the bottom of this mystery?

The police would never believe me. If the very people who had seen her denied her existence, how could I expect those who hadn't to believe in it?

Docile, I let him lead me out to the sidewalk in front of the hotel. The manager came out after us, mopping his forehead, and the desk clerk, and a few of the bolder among the guests who had been watching.

They held a three-cornered consultation in which I took no part. I even let the manager's version of what the trouble was pass unchallenged. Not that he distorted what had actually happened just now, but he made it seem as if I were mistaken about having brought her there last night.

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Finally the harness cop asked, "Well, do you want to press charges against him for creating a disturbance in your lobby?"

The manager held his hands palms out, horrified. "I should say not. We're having our biggest rush of the year right now; I can't take time off to run down there and go through all that tommyrot. Just see that he doesn't come in again and create any more scenes."

"I'll see to that all right," the cop promised truculently.

They went inside again, the manager and the clerk and the gallery that had watched us from the front steps. Inside to the hotel that had swallowed her alive.

The cop read me a lecture, to which I listened in stony silence. Then he gave me a shove that sent me floundering, said, "Keep moving now, hear me?"

I pointed, and said, "That's my car standing there. May I get in it?" He checked first to make sure it was, then he opened the door, said, "Yeah, get in it and get out of here."

He'd made no slightest attempt to find out what was behind the whole thing, whether there was some truth to my story or not, or whether it was drink, drugs, or mental aberration. But then he was only a harness cop. That's why I hadn't wanted to tangle with him.

This strangeness that had risen up around me was nothing to be fought by an ordinary patrolman. I was going to them — the police — but I was going of my own free will and in my own way, not to be dragged in by the scruff of the neck and then put under observation for the next twenty-four hours.

Ten minutes or so later I got in front of the first precinct house I came upon, and went in, and said to the desk sergeant, "I want to talk to the lieutenant in charge."

He stared at me coldly.

"What about?"

"About my wife."

I didn't talk to him alone. Three of his men were present. They were just shapes in the background as far as I was concerned, sitting there very quietly, listening.

I told it simply, hoping against hope I could get them to believe me, feeling somehow I couldn't even before I had started.

"I'm Jimmy Cannon, I'm twenty-five years old, and I'm from Lake City. Last evening after dark my girl and I — her name was Alice Brown — we left there in my car, and at 1:15 this morning we were married by a justice of the peace.

"I think his name was Hulskamp — anyway it's a white house with morning glories all over the porch, about fifty miles this side of Lake City.

"We got in here at three, and they gave her a little room at the Royal Hotel. They couldn't put me up, but they put her up alone. The number was 1006. I know that as well as I know I'm sitting here. This morning when I went over there, they were

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painting the room and I haven't been able to find a trace of her since.

"I saw her sign the register, but her name isn't on it any more. The night clerk says he never saw her. The bellboy says he never saw her. Now they've got me so I'm scared and shaky, like a little kid is of the dark. I want you men to help me. Won't you men help me?"

"We'll help you" — said the lieutenant in charge. Slowly, awfully slowly; I didn't like that slowness — "if we're able to." And I knew what he meant; if we find any evidence that your story is true.

He turned his head toward one of the three shadowy listeners in the background, at random. The one nearest him. Then he changed his mind, shifted his gaze further along, to the one in the middle. "Ainslie, suppose you take a whack at this. Go over to this hotel and see what you can find out. Take him with you."

So, as he stood up, I separated him from the blurred background for the first time. I was disappointed. He was just another man like me, maybe five years older, maybe an inch or two shorter. He could feel cold and hungry and tired, just as I could. He could believe a lie, just as I could. He couldn't see around corners or through walls, or into hearts, any more than I could. What good was he going to be?

He looked as if he'd seen every rotten thing there was in the world. He looked as if he'd once expected to see other things beside that, but didn't any more. He said, "Yes, sir," and you couldn't tell whether he was bored or interested, or liked the detail or resented it, or gave a rap.

On the way over I said, "You've got to find out what became of her. You've got to make them —"

"I'll do what I can." He couldn't seem to get any emotion into his voice. After all, from his point of view, why should he?

"You'll do what you can!" I gasped. "Didn't you ever have a wife?"

He gave me a look, but you couldn't tell what was in it.

We went straight back to the Royal. He was very businesslike, did a streamlined, competent job. Didn't waste a question or a motion, but didn't leave out a single relevant thing either.

I took back what I'd been worried about at first; he was good.

But he wasn't good enough for this, whatever it was.

It went like this: "Let me see your register." He took out a glass, went over the place I pointed out to him where she had signed. Evidently couldn't find any marks of erasure any more than I had with my naked eye.

Then we went up to the room, 1006. The painter was working on the wood trim by now, had all four walls and the ceiling done. It was such a small cubbyhole it wasn't even a half-day's work. He said, "Where was the furniture when you came in here to work this morning? Still in the room, or had the room been cleared?"

"Still in the room; I cleared it my-

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self. There wasn't much; a chair, a scatter-rug, a cot."

"Was the cot made or unmade?"

"Made up."

"Was the window opened or closed when you came in?"

"Closed tight."

"Was the air in the room noticeably stale, as if it had been closed up that way all night, or not noticeably so, as if it had only been closed up shortly before?"

"Turrible, like it hadn't been aired for a week. And believe me, when I notice a place is stuffy, you can bet it's stuffy all right."

"Were there any marks on the walls or floor or anywhere around the room that didn't belong there?"

I knew he meant blood, and gnawed the lining of my cheek fearfully.

"Nothing except plain grime, that needed painting bad."

We visited the housekeeper next. She took us to the linen room and showed us. "If there're any dark blue quilts in use in this house, it's the first I know about it. The bellboy *could* have come in here at that hour — but all he would have gotten are maroon ones. And here's my supply list, every quilt accounted for. So it didn't come from here."

We visited the baggage room next. "Look around and see if there's anything in here that resembles that bag of your wife's." I did, and there wasn't. Wherever she had gone, whatever had become of her, her bag had gone with her.

About fifty minutes after we'd first gone in, we were back in my car outside the hotel again. He'd done a good, thorough job; and if I was willing to admit that, it must have been.

We sat there without moving a couple of minutes, me under the wheel. He kept looking at me steadily, sizing me up. I couldn't tell what he was thinking. I threw my head back and started to look up the face of the building, story by story. I counted as my eyes rose, and when they'd come to the tenth floor I stopped them there, swung them around the corner of the building to the third window from the end, stopped them there for good. It was a skinnier window than the others. So small, so high up, to hold so much mystery. "Alice," I whispered up to it, and it didn't answer, didn't hear.

His voice brought my gaze down from there again. "The burden of the proof has now fallen on you. It's up to you to give me some evidence that she actually went in there. That she actually was with you. That she actually *was*. I wasn't able to find a single person in that building who actually saw her."

I just looked at him, the kind of a look you get from someone right after you stick a knife in his heart. Finally I said with quiet bitterness, "So now I have to prove I had a wife."

The instant, remorseless way he answered that was brutal in itself. "Yes, you do. Can you?"

I pushed my hat off, raked my fingers through my hair, with one and the same gesture. "Could you, if

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someone asked you in the middle of the street? Could you?"

He peeled out a wallet, flipped it open. A tiny snapshot of a woman's head and shoulders danced in front of my eyes for a split second. He folded it and put it away again. He briefly touched a gold band on his finger, token of that old custom that is starting to revive again, of husbands wearing marriage rings as well as wives.

"And a dozen other ways. You could call Tremont 4102. Or you could call the marriage clerk at the City Hall —"

"But we were just beginning," I said bleakly. "I have no pictures. She was wearing the only ring we had. The certificate was to be mailed to us at Lake City in a few days. You could call this justice of the peace, Hulskamp, out near U. S. 9; he'll tell you —"

"Okay, Cannon, I'll do that. We'll go back to headquarters, I'll tell the lieutenant what I've gotten so far, and I'll do it from there."

Now at last it would be over, now at last it would be straightened out. He left me sitting in the room outside the lieutenant's office, while he was in there reporting to him. He seemed to take a long time, so I knew he must be doing more than just reporting; they must be talking it over.

Finally Ainslie looked out at me, but only to say, "What was the name of that justice you say married you, again?"

"Hulskamp."

He closed the door again. I had another long wait. Finally it opened a second time, he hitched his head at me to come in. The atmosphere, when I got in there, was one of hard, brittle curiosity, without any feeling to it. As when you look at somebody afflicted in a way you never heard of before, and wonder how he got that way.

I got that distinctly. Even from Ainslie, and it was fairly oozing from his lieutenant and the other men in the room. They looked and looked and looked at me.

The lieutenant did the talking. "You say a Justice Hulskamp married you. You still say that?"

"A white house sitting off the road, this side of Lake City, just before you get to U. S. 9 —"

"Well, there is a Justice Hulskamp, and he does live out there. We just had him on the phone. He says he never married anyone named James Cannon to anyone named Alice Brown, last night or any other night. He hasn't married anyone who looks like you, recently, to anyone who looks as you say she did. He didn't marry anyone at all at any time last night —"

He was going off some place while he talked to me, and his voice was going away after him. Ainslie filled a paper cup with water at the cooler in the corner, strewed it deftly across my face, once each way, as if I were some kind of a potted plant, and one of the other guys picked me up from the floor and put me back on the chair again.

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The lieutenant's voice came back again stronger, as if he hadn't gone away after all. "Who were her people in Lake City?"

"She was an orphan."

"Well, where did she work there?"

"At the house of a family named Beresford, at 20 New Hampshire Avenue. She was in service there, a maid; she lived with them —"

"Give me long distance. Give me Lake City. This is Michianopolis police headquarters. I want to talk to a party named Beresford, 20 New Hampshire Avenue."

The ring came back fast. "We're holding a man here who claims he married a maid working for you. A girl by the name of Alice Brown."

He'd hung up before I even knew it was over. "There's no maid employed there. They don't know anything about any Alice Brown, never heard of her."

I stayed on the chair this time. I just didn't hear so clearly for a while, everything sort of fuzzy.

". . . Hallucinations . . . And he's in a semi-hysterical condition right now. Notice how jerky his reflexes are?" Someone was chopping the edge of his hand at my kneecaps. "Seems harmless. Let him go. It'll probably wear off. I'll give him a sedative." Someone snapped a bag shut, left the room.

The lieutenant's voice was as flat as it was deadly, and it brooked no argument. "You never had a wife, Cannon!"

I could see only Ainslie's face in the welter before me. "You have, though, haven't you?" I said, so low none of the others could catch it.

The lieutenant was still talking to me. "Now get out of here before we change our minds and call an ambulance to take you away. And don't go back into any more hotels raising a row."

I hung around outside; I wouldn't go away. Where was there to go? One of the others came out, looked at me fleetingly in passing, said with humorous tolerance, "You better get out of here before the lieutenant catches you," and went on about his business.

I waited until I saw Ainslie come out. Then I went up to him. "I've got to talk to you; you've got to listen to me —"

"Why? The matter's closed. You heard the lieutenant."

He went back to some sort of a locker room. I went after him.

"You're not supposed to come back here. Now look, Cannon, I'm telling you for your own good, you're looking for trouble if you keep this up."

"Don't turn me down," I said hoarsely, tugging away at the seam of his sleeve. "Can't you see the state I'm in? I'm like someone in a dark room, crying for a match. I'm like someone drowning, crying for a helping hand. I can't make it alone any more."

There wasn't anyone in the place but just the two of us. My pawing grip slipped down his sleeve to the

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hem of his coat, and I was looking up at him from my knees. What did I care? There was no such thing as pride or dignity any more. I would have crawled flat along the floor on my belly, just to get a word of relief out of anyone.

"Forget you're a detective, and I'm a case. I'm appealing to you as one human being to another. I'm appealing to you as one husband to another. Don't turn your back on me like that, don't pull my hands away from your coat. I don't ask you to do anything for me any more; you don't have to lift a finger. Just say, 'Yes, you had a wife, Cannon.' Just give me that one glimmer of light in the dark. Say it even if you don't mean it, even if you don't believe it, say it anyway. Oh, say it, will you —"

He drew the back of his hand slowly across his mouth, either in disgust at my abasement or in a sudden access of pity. Maybe a little of both. His voice was hoarse, as if he were sore at the spot I was putting him on.

"Give me anything," he said, shaking me a little and jogging me to my feet, "the slightest thing, to show that she ever existed, to show that there ever was such a person outside of your own mind, and I'll be with you to the bitter end. Give me a pin that she used to fasten her dress with. Give me a grain of powder, a stray hair; but prove that it was hers. But I can't do it unless you do."

"And I have nothing to show you. Not a pin, not a grain of powder."

I took a few dragging steps toward the locker-room door. "You're doing something to me that I wouldn't do to a dog," I mumbled. "What you're doing to me is worse than if you were to kill me. You're locking me up in shadows for the rest of my life. You're taking my mind away from me. You're condemning me slowly but surely to madness, to being without a mind. It won't happen right away, but sooner or later, in six months or in a year — Well, I guess that's that."

I fumbled my way out of the locker room and down the passageway outside, guiding myself with one arm along the wall, and past the sergeant's desk and down the steps, and then I was out in the street.

I left my car there where it was. What did I want with it? I started to walk, without knowing where I was going. I walked a long time, and a good long distance.

Then all of a sudden I noticed a lighted drugstore — it was dark by now — across the way. I must have passed others before now, but this was the first one I noticed.

I crossed over and looked in the open doorway. It had telephone booths; I could see them at the back, to one side. I moved on a few steps, stopped, and felt in my pockets. I found a quill toothpick, and I dug the point of it good and hard down the back of my finger, ripped the skin open. Then I threw it away. I wrapped a handkerchief around the finger, and I turned around and went inside.

I said to the clerk, "Give me some iodine. My cat just scratched me and

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I don't want to take any chances."

He said, "Want me to put it on for you?"

I said, "No, gimme the whole bottle. I'll take it home; we're out of it."

I paid him for it and moved over to one side and started to thumb through one of the directories in the rack. Just as he went back inside the prescription room, I found my number. I went into the end booth and pulled the slide closed. I took off my hat and hung it over the phone mouthpiece, sort of making myself at home.

Then I sat down and started to undo the paper he'd just wrapped around the bottle. When I had it off, I pulled the knot of my tie out a little further to give myself lots of room. Then I took the stopper out of the bottle and tilted my head back and braced myself.

Something that felt like a baseball bat came chopping down on the arm I was bringing up, and nearly broke it in two, and the iodine sprayed all over the side of the booth. Ainslie was standing there in the half-opened slide.

He said, "Come on outta there!" and gave me a pull by the collar of my coat that did it for me. He didn't say anything more until we were out on the sidewalk in front of the place. Then he stopped and looked me over from head to foot as if I were some kind of a microbe. He said, "Well, it was worth coming all this way after you, at that!"

My car was standing there; I must have left the keys in it and he must have tailed me in that. He thumbed it, and I went over and climbed in and sat there limply. He stayed outside, with one foot on the running board.

I said, "I can't live with shadows, Ainslie. I'm frightened, too frightened to go on. You don't know what the nights'll be like from now on. And the days won't be much better. I'd rather go now, fast. Show her to me on a slab at the morgue and I won't whimper. Show her to me all cut up in small pieces and I won't bat an eyelash. But don't say she never was."

"I guessed what was coming from the minute I saw you jab yourself with that toothpick." He watched sardonically while I slowly unwound the handkerchief, that had stayed around my finger all this time. The scratch had hardly bled at all. Just a single hairline of red was on the handkerchief.

We both looked at that.

Then more of the handkerchief came open. We both looked at the initials in the corner. *A. B.* We both, most likely, smelled the faint sweetness that still came from it at the same time. Very faint, for it was such a small handkerchief.

We both looked at each other, and both our minds made the same discovery at the same time. I was the one who spoke it aloud. "It's hers," I said grimly; "the wife that didn't exist."

"This is a fine time to come out with it," he said quietly. "Move over, I'll drive." That was his way of saying, "I'm in."

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I said, "I remember now. I got a cinder in my eye, during the drive in, and she lent me her handkerchief to take it out with; I didn't have one of my own on me. I guess I forgot to give it back to her. And this — is it." I looked at him rebukingly. "What a difference a few square inches of linen can make. Without it, I was a madman. With it, I'm a rational being who enlists your cooperation. I could have picked it up in any five-and-ten."

"No. You didn't turn it up when it would have done you the most good, back at the station house. You only turned it up several minutes after you were already supposed to have gulped a bottle of iodine. I could tell by your face you'd forgotten about it until then yourself. I think that does make a difference. To me it does, anyway." He meshed gears.

"And what're you going to do about it?"

"Since we don't believe in the supernatural, our only possible premise is that there's been some human agency at work."

I noticed the direction he was taking. "Aren't you going back to the Royal?"

"There's no use bothering with the hotel. D'you see what I mean?"

"No, I don't," I said bluntly. "That was where she disappeared."

"The focus for this wholesale case of astigmatism is elsewhere, outside the hotel. It's true we could try to break them down, there at the hotel. But what about the justice, what about the Beresford house in Lake City? I think it'll be simpler to try to find out the reason rather than the mechanics of the disappearance.

"And the reason lies elsewhere. Because you brought her to the hotel from the justice's. And to the justice's from Lake City. The hotel was the last stage. Find out why the justice denies he married you, and we don't have to find out why the hotel staff denies having seen her. Find out why the Beresford house denies she was a maid there, and we don't have to find out why the justice denies he married you.

"Find out, maybe, something else, and we don't have to find out why the Beresford house denies she was a maid there. The time element keeps moving backward through the whole thing. Now talk to me. How long did you know her? How well? How much did you know about her?"

"Not long. Not well. Practically nothing. It was one of those storybook things. I met her a week ago last night. She was sitting on a bench in the park, as if she were lonely, didn't have a friend in the world. I don't make a habit of accosting girls on park benches, but she looked so dejected it got to me.

"Well, that's how we met. I walked her home afterwards to where she said she lived. But when we got there — holy smoke, it was a mansion! I got nervous, said: 'Gee, this is a pretty swell place for a guy like me to be bringing anyone home to, just a clerk in a store.'

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"She laughed and said, 'I'm only the maid. Disappointed?' I said, 'No, I would have been disappointed if you'd been anybody else, because then you wouldn't be in my class.' She seemed relieved after I said that. She said, 'Gee, I've waited so long to find someone who'd like me for myself.'

"Well, to make a long story short, we made an appointment to meet at that same bench the next night. I waited there for two hours and she never showed up. Luckily I went back there the next night again — and there she was. She explained she hadn't been able to get out the night before; the people where she worked were having company or something.

"When I took her home that night I asked her name, which I didn't know yet, and that seemed to scare her. She got sort of flustered, and I saw her look at her handbag. It had the initials *A.B.* on it; I'd already noticed that the first night I met her. She said, 'Alice Brown.'

"By the third time we met we were already nuts about each other. I asked her whether she'd take a chance and marry me. She said, 'Is it possible someone wants to marry little Alice Brown, who hasn't a friend in the world?' I said yes, and that was all there was to it.

"Only, when I left her that night, she seemed kind of scared. First I thought she was scared I'd change my mind, back out, but it wasn't that. She said, 'Jimmy, let's hurry up and do it, don't let's put it off. Let's do it while — while we have the chance'; and she hung onto my sleeve tight with both hands.

"So the next day I asked for a week off, which I had coming to me from last summer anyway, and I waited for her with the car on the corner three blocks away from the house where she was in service. She came running as if the devil were behind her, but I thought that was because she didn't want to keep me waiting. She just had that one little overnight bag with her.

"She jumped in, and her face looked kind of white, and she said, 'Hurry, Jimmy, hurry!' And away we went. And until we were outside of Lake City, she kept looking back every once in a while, as if she were afraid someone was coming after us."

Ainslie didn't say much after all that rigmarole I'd given him. Just five words, after we'd driven on for about ten minutes or so. "She was afraid of something." And then in another ten minutes, "And whatever it was, it's what's caught up with her now."

We stopped at the filling station where Alice and I had stopped for gas the night before. I looked over the attendants, said: "There's the one serviced us." Ainslie called him over, played a pocket light on my face.

"Do you remember servicing this man last night? This man, and a girl with him?"

"Nope, not me. Maybe one of the oth —"

Neither of us could see his hands at

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the moment; they were out of range below the car door. I said, "He's got a white scar across the back of his right hand. I saw it last night when he was wiping the windshield."

Ainslie said, "Hold it up."

He did, and there was a white cicatrice across it, where stitches had been taken or something. Ainslie said, "Now whaddye say?"

It didn't shake him in the least. "I still say no. Maybe he saw me at one time or another, but I've never seen him, to my knowledge, with or without a girl." He waited a minute, then added: "Why should I deny it, if it was so?"

"We'll be back, in a day or in a week or in a month," Ainslie let him know grimly, "but we'll be back — to find that out."

We drove on. "Those four square inches of linen handkerchief will be wearing pretty thin, if this keeps up," I muttered dejectedly after a while.

"Don't let that worry you," he said, looking straight ahead. "Once I'm sold, I don't unsell easily."

We crossed U. S. 9 a half-hour later. A little white house came skimming along out of the darkness. "This is where I was married to a ghost," I said.

He braked, twisted the grip of the door latch. My hand shot down, stopped his arm.

"Wait; before you go in, listen to this. It may help out that handkerchief. There'll be a round mirror in the hall, to the left of the door, with antlers over it for a hatrack. In their parlor, where he read the service, there'll be an upright piano, with brass candle holders sticking out of the front of it, above the keyboard. It's got a scarf on it that ends in a lot of little plush balls. And on the music rack, the top selection is a copy of *Kiss Me Again*. And on the wall there's a painting of a lot of fruit rolling out of a basket. And this housekeeper, he calls her Dora."

"That's enough," he said in that toneless voice of his. "I told you I was with you anyway, didn't I?" He got out and went over and rang the bell. I went with him, of course.

They must have been asleep; they didn't answer right away. Then the housekeeper opened the door and looked out at us. Before we could say anything, we heard the justice call down the stairs, "Who is it, Dora?"

Ainslie asked if we could come in and talk to him, and straightened his necktie in the round mirror to the left of the door, with antlers over it.

Hulskamp came down in a bathrobe, and Ainslie said: "You married this man to a girl named Alice Brown last night." It wasn't a question.

The justice said, "No. I've already been asked that once, over the phone, and I said I hadn't. I've never seen this young man before." He even put on his glasses to look at me better.

Ainslie didn't argue the matter, almost seemed to take him at his word. "I won't ask you to let me see your records," he said drily, "because they'll undoubtedly — bear out your word."

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He strolled as far as the parlor entrance, glanced in idly. I peered over his shoulder. There was an upright piano with brass candle sconces. A copy of *Kiss Me Again* was topmost on its rack. A painting of fruit rolling out of a basket daubed the wall.

"They certainly will!" snapped the justice resentfully.

The housekeeper put her oar in. "I'm a witness at all the marriages the justice performs, and I'm sure the young man's mistaken. I don't ever recall —"

Ainslie steadied me with one hand clasping my arm, and led me out without another word. We got in the car again. Their door closed, somewhat forcefully.

I pounded the rim of the wheel helplessly with my fist. I said, "What is it? Some sort of wholesale conspiracy? But *why*? She's not important; I'm not important."

He threw in the clutch, the little white house ebbed away in the night-darkness behind us.

"It's some sort of a conspiracy, all right," he said. "We've got to get the reason for it. That's the quickest, shortest way to clear it up. To take any of the weaker links, the bellboy at the hotel or that filling station attendant, and break them down, would not only take days, but in the end would only get us some anonymous individual who'd either threatened them or paid them to forget having seen your wife, and we wouldn't be much further than before. If we can get the reason behind it all, the source, we don't have to bother with any of these small fry. That's why we're heading back to Lake City instead of just concentrating on that hotel in Michianopolis."

We made Lake City by one A.M. and I showed him the way to New Hampshire Avenue. Number 20 was a massive corner house, and we glided up to it from the back, along the side street; braked across the way from the service entrance I'd always brought her back to. Not a light was showing.

"Don't get out yet," he said. "When you brought her home nights, you brought her to this back door, right?"

"Yes."

"Tell me, did you ever actually see her open it and go in, or did you just leave her here by it and walk off without waiting to see where she went?"

I felt myself get a little frightened again. This was something that hadn't occurred to me until now. "I didn't once actually see the door open and her go inside, now that I come to think of it. She seemed to — to want me to walk off without waiting. She didn't say so, but I could tell. I thought maybe it was because she didn't want her employers to catch on she was going around with anyone. I'd walk off, down that way —"

I pointed to the corner behind us, on the next avenue over. "Then when I got there, I'd look back from there each time. As anyone would. Each time I did, she wasn't there any more. I thought she'd gone in, but — it's funny, I never saw her go in."

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He nodded gloomily. "Just about what I thought. For all you know, she didn't even belong in that house, never went in there at all. A quick little dash, while your back was turned, would have taken her around the corner of the house and out of sight. And the city would have swallowed her up."

"But why?" I said helplessly.

He didn't answer that. We hadn't had a good look at the front of the house yet. As I have said, we had approached from the rear, along the side street. He got out of the car now, and I followed suit. We walked down the few remaining yards to the corner, and turned and looked all up and down the front of it.

It was an expensive limestone building; it spelt real dough, even looking at it in the dark as we were. There was a light showing from the front, through one of the tall ground-floor windows — but a very dim one, almost like a night light. It didn't send any shine outside; just peered wanly around the sides of the blind that had been drawn on the inside.

Something moved close up against the door-facing, stirred a little. If it hadn't been white limestone, it wouldn't have even been noticeable at all. We both saw it at once; I caught instinctively at Ainslie's arm, and a cold knife of dull fear went through me — though why I couldn't tell.

"Crepe on the front door," he whispered. "Somebody's dead in there. Whether she did go in here or didn't, just the same I think we'd better have a look at the inside of this place."

I took a step in the direction of the front door. He recalled me with a curt gesture. "And by that I don't mean march up the front steps, ring the doorbell, and flash my badge."

"Then how?"

Brakes ground somewhere along the side street behind us. We turned our heads and a lacquered sedan-truck had drawn up directly before the service door of 20 New Hampshire Avenue. "Just in time," Ainslie said. "This is how."

We started back toward it. The driver and a helper had gotten down, were unloading batches of camp chairs and stacking them up against the side of the truck, preparatory to taking them in.

"For the services tomorrow, I suppose," Ainslie grunted. He said to the driver: "Who is it that died, bud?"

"Mean to say you ain't heard? It's in alla papers."

"We're from out of town."

"Alma Beresford, the heiress. Richest gal in twenty-four states. She was an orphum, too. Pretty soft for her guardian; not another soul to get the cash but him."

"What was it?" For the first time since I'd known him, you couldn't have called Ainslie's voice toneless; it was sort of springy like a rubber band that's pulled too tight.

"Heart attack, I think." The truckman snapped his fingers. "Like that. Shows you that rich or poor, when you gotta go, you gotta go."

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Ainslie asked only one more question. "Why you bringing these setups at an hour like this? They're not going to hold the services in the middle of the night, are they?"

"Nah, but first thing in the morning; so early there wouldn't be a chance to get 'em over here unless we delivered 'em ahead of time." He was suddenly staring fascinatedly at the silvery lining of Ainslie's hand.

Ainslie's voice was toneless again. "Tell you what you fellows are going to do. You're going to save yourselves the trouble of hauling all those camp chairs inside, and you're going to get paid for it in the bargain. Lend us those work aprons y'got on."

He slipped them something apiece; I couldn't see whether it was two dollars or five. "Gimme your delivery ticket; I'll get it receipted for you. You two get back in the truck and lie low."

We both doffed our hats and coats, put them in our own car, rolled our shirtsleeves, put on the work aprons, and rang the service bell. There was a short wait and then a wire-sheathed bulb over the entry glimmered pallidly as an indication someone was coming. The door opened and a gaunt-faced sandy-haired man looked out at us. It was hard to tell just how old he was. He looked like a butler, but he was dressed in a business suit.

"Camp chairs from the Thebes Funerary Chapel," Ainslie said, reading from the delivery ticket.

"Follow me and I'll show you where they're to go," he said in a hushed voice. "Be as quiet as you can. We've only just succeeded in getting Mr. Hastings to lie down and try to rest a little." The guardian, I supposed. In which case this anemic-looking customer would be the guardian's Man Friday.

We each grabbed up a double armful of the camp chairs and went in after him. They were corded together in batches of half a dozen. We could have cleared up the whole consignment at once — they were lightweight — but Ainslie gave me the eye not to; I guess he wanted to have an excuse to prolong our presence as much as possible.

You went down a short delivery passageway, then up a few steps into a brightly lighted kitchen.

A hatchet-faced woman in maid's livery was sitting by a table crying away under one eye-shading hand, a teacup and a tumbler of gin before her. Judging by the redness of her nose, she'd been at it for hours. "My baby," she'd mew every once in a while.

We followed him out at the other side, through a pantry, a gloomy-looking dining room, and finally into a huge cavernous front room, eerily suffused with flickering candlelight that did no more than heighten the shadows in its far corners. It was this wavering pallor that we must have seen from outside of the house.

An open coffin rested on a flower-massed bier at the upper end of the place, a lighted taper glimmering at

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each corner of it. A violet velvet pall had been spread over the top of it, concealing what lay within.

But a tiny peaked outline, that could have been made by an uptilted nose, was visible in the plush at one extremity of its length. That knife of dread gave an excruciating little twist in me, and again I didn't know why — or refused to admit I did. It was as if I instinctively sensed the nearness of something familiar.

The rest of the room, before this monument to mortality, had been left clear, its original furniture moved aside or taken out. The man who had admitted us gave us our instructions.

"Arrange them in four rows, here in front of the bier. Leave an aisle through them. And be sure and leave enough space up ahead for the divine who will deliver the oration." Then he retreated to the door and stood watching us for a moment.

Ainslie produced a knife from the pocket of his borrowed apron, began severing the cording that bound the frames of the camp chairs together. I opened them one at a time as he freed them and began setting them up in quadruple rows, being as slow about it as I could.

There was a slight sound and the factotum had tiptoed back toward the kitchen for a moment, perhaps for a sip of the comforting gin. Ainslie raised his head, caught my eye, speared his thumb at the bier imperatively. I was the nearer of us to it at the moment. I knew what he meant: look and see who it was.

I went cold all over, but I put down the camp chair I was fiddling with and edged over toward it on arched feet. The taper-flames bent down flat as I approached them, and sort of hissed. Sweat needled out under the roots of my hair. I went around by the head, where that tiny little peak was, reached out, and gingerly took hold of the corners of the velvet pall, which fell loosely over the two sides of the coffin without quite meeting the headboard.

Just as my wrists flexed to tip it back, Ainslie coughed warningly. There was a whispered returning tread from beyond the doorway. I let go, took a quick side-jump back toward where I'd been.

I glanced around and the secretary fellow had come back again, was standing there with his eyes fixed on me. I pretended to be measuring off the distance for the pulpit with my foot.

"You men are rather slow about it," he said, thin-lipped.

"You want 'em just so, don't you?" Ainslie answered. He went out to get the second batch. I pretended one of the stools had jammed and I was having trouble getting it open, as an excuse to linger behind. The secretary was on his guard. He lingered too.

The dick took care of that. He waited until he was halfway back with his load of camp chairs, then dropped them all over the pantry floor with a clatter, to draw the watchdog off.

It worked. He gave a huff of annoyance, turned, and went in to bawl

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Ainslie out for the noise he had made. The minute the doorway cleared, I gave a cat-like spring back toward the velvet mound. This time I made it. I flung the pall back —

Then I let go of it, and the lighted candles started spinning around my head, faster and faster, until they made a comet-like track of fire. The still face staring up at me from the coffin was Alice's.

I felt my knees hit something, and I was swaying back and forth on them there beside the bier. I could hear somebody coming back toward the room, but whether it was Ainslie or the other guy I didn't know and didn't care. Then an arm went around me and steadied me to my feet once more, so I knew it was Ainslie.

"It's her," I said brokenly. "Alice. I can't understand it; she must — have — been this rich girl, Alma Beresford, all the time —"

He let go of me, took a quick step over to the coffin, flung the pall even further back than I had. He dipped his head, as if he were staring nearsightedly. Then he turned and I never felt my shoulder grabbed so hard before, or since. His fingers felt like steel claws that went in, and met in the the middle. For a minute I didn't know whether he was attacking me or not; and I was too dazed to care.

He was pointing at the coffin. "Look at that!" he demanded. I didn't know what he meant. He shook me brutally, either to get me to understand or because he was so excited himself. "*She's not dead.* Watch her chest cavern."

I fixed my eyes on it. You could tell only by watching the line where the white satin of her burial gown met the violet quilting of the coffin lining. The white was faintly, but unmistakably and rhythmically, rising and falling.

"They've got her either drugged or in a coma —"

He broke off short, let go of me as if my shoulder were red-hot and burned his fingers. His hand flashed down and up again, and he'd drawn and sighted over my shoulder. "Put it down or I'll let you have it right where you are!" he said.

Something thudded to the carpet. I turned and the secretary was standing there in the doorway, palms out, a fallen revolver lying at his feet.

"Go over and get that, Cannon," Ainslie ordered. "This looks like the finale now. Let's see what we've got."

There was an arched opening behind him, leading out to the front entrance hall, I suppose, and the stairway to the upper floors. We'd come in from the rear, remember. Velvet drapes had been drawn closed over that arch, sealing it up, the whole time we'd been in there.

He must have come in through there. I bent down before the motionless secretary, and, with my fingers an inch away from the fallen gun at his feet, I heard the impact of a head blow and Ainslie gave the peculiar guttural groan of someone going down into unconsciousness.

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The secretary's foot snaked out and sped the gun skidding far across to the other side of the room. Then he dropped on my curved back like a dead weight and I went down flat under him, pushing my face into the parquet flooring.

He kept aiming blows at the side of my head from above, but he had only his fists to work with at the moment, and even the ones that landed weren't as effective as whatever it was that had been used on Ainslie. I reached upward and over, caught the secretary by the shoulders of his coat, tugged and at the same time jerked my body out from under him in the opposite direction; and he came flying up in a backward somersault and landed sprawling a few feet away.

I got up and looked. Ainslie lay inert, face down on the floor to one side of the coffin, something gleaming wet down the part of his hair. There was a handsome but vicious-looking gray-haired man in a brocaded dressing gown standing behind him holding a gun on me, trying to cow me with it.

"Get him, Mr. Hastings," panted the one I'd just flung off.

It would have taken more than a gun to hold me, after what I'd been through. I charged at him, around Ainslie's form. He evidently didn't want to fire, didn't want the noise of a shot to be heard there in the house. Instead, he reversed his gun, swung the butt high up over his shoulder; and my own head-first charge undid me. I couldn't swerve or brake in time, plunged right in under it. A hissing, spark-shedding skyrocket seemed to tear through the top of my head, and I went down into nothingness as Ainslie had.

For an hour after I recovered consciousness I was in complete darkness. Such utter darkness that I couldn't be sure the blow hadn't affected my optic nerve.

I was in a sitting position, on something cold — stone flooring probably — with my hands lashed behind me, around something equally cold and sweating moisture, most likely a water pipe. My feet were tied too, and there was a gag over my mouth. My head blazed with pain.

After what seemed like an age, a smoky gray light began to dilute the blackness; so at least my eyesight wasn't impaired. As the light strengthened it showed me first a barred grate high up on the wall through which the dawn was peering in. Next, a dingy basement around me, presumably that of the same New Hampshire Avenue house we had entered several hours ago.

And finally, if that was any consolation to me, Ainslie sitting facing me from across the way, in about the same fix I was. Hands and feet secured, sitting before another pipe, mouth also gagged. A dark stain down one side of his forehead, long since dried, marked the effect of the blow he had received.

We just stared at each other, unable to communicate. We could turn

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our heads. He shook his from side to side deprecatingly. I knew what he meant: "Fine spot we ended up in, didn't we?" I nodded, meaning, "You said it."

But we were enjoying perfect comfort and peace of mind, compared to what was to follow. It came within about half an hour at the most. Sounds of activity began to penetrate to where we were. First a desultory moving about sounded over our heads, as if someone were looking things over to make sure everything was in order. Then something heavy was set down: it might have been a table, a desk — or a pulpit.

This cellar compartment we were in seemed to be directly under that large front room where the coffin was and where the obsequies were to be held.

A dawning horror began to percolate through me. I looked at Ainslie and tried to make him understand what I was thinking. I didn't need to, he was thinking the same thing.

She'd been alive when we'd last seen her, last night. Early this same morning, rather. What were they going to do — go ahead with it anyway?

A car door clashed faintly, somewhere off in the distance outside. It must have been at the main entrance of this very house we were in, for within a moment or two new footsteps sounded overhead, picking their way along, as down an aisle under guidance. Then something scraped slightly, like the leg rests of a camp chair straining under the weight of a body.

It repeated itself eight or ten times after that. The impact of a car door outside in the open, then the sedate footsteps over us — some the flat dull ones of men, some the sharp brittle ones of women — then the slight shift and click of the camp chairs. I didn't have to be told its meaning; probably Ainslie didn't either. The mourners were arriving for the services.

It was probably unintentional, our having been placed directly below like this; but it was the most diabolic torture that could ever have been devised. Was she dead yet, or wasn't she? But she had to be before —

They couldn't be that low. Maybe the drug she'd been under last night was timed to take fatal effect between then and now. But suppose it hadn't?

The two of us were writhing there like maimed snakes. Ainslie kept trying to bring his knees up and meet them with his chin, and at first I couldn't understand what his idea was. It was to snag the gag in the cleft between his two tightly pressed knees and pull it down, or at least dislodge it sufficiently to get some sound out. I immediately began trying the same thing myself.

Meanwhile an ominous silence had descended above us. No more car-door thuds, no more footsteps mincing down the aisle to their seats. The services were being held.

The lower half of my face was all numb by now from hitting my bony up-ended knees so many times. And still I couldn't work it. Neither could

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he. The rounded structure of the kneecaps kept them from getting close enough to our lips to act as pincers. If only one of us could have made it. If we could hear them that clearly down here, they would have been able to hear us yell up there. And they couldn't all be in on the plot, all those mourners, friends of the family or whoever they were.

Bad as the preliminaries had been, they were as nothing compared to the concluding stages that we now had to endure listening to. There was a sudden concerted mass shifting and scraping above, as if everyone had risen to his feet at one time.

Then a slow, single-file shuffling started in, going in one direction, returning in another. The mourners were filing around the coffin one by one for a last look at the departed. The departed who was still living.

After the last of them had gone out, and while the incessant cracking of car doors was still under way outside, marking the forming of the funeral cortege, there was a quick, business-like converging of not more than two pairs of feet on one certain place — where the coffin was. A hurried shifting about for a moment or two, then a sharp hammering on wood penetrated to where we were, and nearly drove me crazy; they were fastening down the lid.

After a slight pause that might have been employed in reopening the closed-room doors, more feet came in, all male, and moving toward that one certain place where the first two had preceded them. These must be the pallbearers, four or six of them. There was a brief scraping and jockeying about while they lifted the casket to their shoulders, and then the slow, measured tread with which they carried it outside to the waiting hearse.

I let my head fall inertly downward as far over as I could bend it, so Ainslie wouldn't see the tears running out of my eyes.

Motion attracted me and I looked blurredly up again. He was shaking his head steadily back and forth. "Don't give up, keep trying," he meant to say. "It's not too late yet."

About five or ten minutes after the hearse had left, a door opened surreptitiously somewhere close at hand; and a stealthy, frightened tread began to descend toward us, evidently along some steps that were back of me.

Ainslie could see who it was — he was facing that way — but I couldn't until the hatchet-faced maid we had seen crying in the kitchen the night before suddenly sidled out between us. She kept looking back in the direction from which she'd just come, as if scared of her life. She had an ordinary kitchen bread knife in her hand. She wasn't in livery now, but black-hatted, coated and gloved, as if she had started out for the cemetery with the rest and then slipped back unnoticed.

She went for Ainslie's bonds first, cackling terrifiedly the whole time she was sawing away at them. "Oh, if they ever find out I did this, I don't

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know what they'll do to me! I didn't even know you were down here until I happened to overhear Mr. Hastings whisper to his secretary just now before they left, 'Leave the other two where they are, we can attend to them when we come back.' Which one of you is her Jimmy? She confided in me; I knew about it; I helped her slip in and out of the house that whole week. I took her place under the bedcovers, so that when he'd look in he'd think she was asleep in her room.

"They had no right to do this to you and your friend, Jimmy, even though you were the cause of her death. The excitement was too much for her, she'd been so carefully brought up. She got this heart attack and died. She was already unconscious when they brought her back — from wherever it was you ran off with her to.

"I don't know why I'm helping you. You're a reckless, bad, fortune-hunting scoundrel; Mr. Hastings says so. The marriage wouldn't have been legal anyway; she didn't use her right name. It cost him all kinds of money to hush everyone up about it and destroy the documents, so it wouldn't be found out and you wouldn't have a chance to blackmail her later.

"You killed my baby! But still he should have turned you over to the police, not kept you tied up all ni —"

At this point she finally got through, and Ainslie's gag flew out of his mouth like one of those feathered darts kids shoot through a blow-tube. "I *am* the police!" he panted. "And your 'baby' has been murdered, or will be within the next few minutes, by Hastings himself, not this boy here! She was still alive in that coffin at two o'clock this morning."

She gave a scream like the noon whistle of a factory. He kept her from fainting, or at any rate falling in a heap, by pinning her to the wall, took the knife away from her. He freed me in one-tenth of the time it had taken her to rid him of his own bonds. "No," she was groaning hollowly through her hands, "her own family doctor, a lifelong friend of her father and mother, examined her after she was gone, made out the death certificate. He's an honest man, he wouldn't do that —"

"He's old, I take it. Did he see her face?" Ainslie interrupted.

A look of almost stupid consternation froze on her own face. "No. I was at the bedside with him; it was covered. But only a moment before she'd been lying there in full view. The doctor and I both saw her from the door. Then Mr. Hastings had a fainting spell in the other room, and we ran to help him. When the doctor came in again to proceed with his examination, Mr. Chivers had covered her face — to spare Mr. Hastings' feelings.

"Dr. Meade just examined her body. Mr. Hastings pleaded with him not to remove the covering, said he couldn't bear it. And my pet was still wearing the little wrist watch her mother gave her before she died —"

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"They substituted another body for hers, that's all; I don't care how many wrist watches it had on it," Ainslie told her brutally. "Stole that of a young girl approximately her own age who had just died from heart failure or some other natural cause, most likely from one of the hospital morgues, and put it over on the doddering family doctor and you both.

"If you look, you'll probably find something in the papers about a vanished corpse. The main thing is to stop that burial; I'm not positive enough on it to take a chance. It may be she in the coffin after all, and not the substitute. Where was the interment to be?"

"In the family plot, at Cypress Hill."

"Come on, Cannon; got your circulation back yet?" He was at the top of the stairs already. "Get the local police and tell them to meet us out there."

Ainslie's badge was all that got us into the cemetery, which was private. The casket had already been lowered out of sight. They were throwing the first shovelsful of earth over it as we burst through the little ring of sedate, bowing mourners.

The last thing I saw was Ainslie snatching an implement from one of the cemetery workers and jumping down bodily into the opening, feet first.

The face of that silver-haired devil, her guardian Hastings, had focused in on my inflamed eyes.

A squad of Lake City police, arriving only minutes after us, were all that saved his life. It took three of them to pull me off him.

Ainslie's voice was what brought me to, more than anything else. "It's all right, Cannon," he was yelling over and over from somewhere behind me. "It's the substitute."

I stumbled over to the lip of the grave between two of the cops and took a look down. It was the face of a stranger that was peering up at me through the shattered coffin lid. I turned away, and they made the mistake of letting go of me.

I went at the secretary this time; Hastings was still stretched out more dead then alive. "What've you done with her? Where've you got her?"

"That ain't the way to make him answer," Ainslie said, and for the second and last time throughout the whole affair his voice wasn't toneless. "*This* is!"

Wham! We had to take about six steps forward to catch up with the secretary where he was now.

Ainslie's method was all right at that. The secretary talked — fast.

Alice was safe; but she wouldn't have been, much longer. After the mourners had had a last look at her in the coffin, Hastings and the secretary had locked her up for safekeeping — stupefied, of course — and substituted the other body for burial.

And Alice's turn was to come later, when, under cover of night, she was to be spirited away to a hunting lodge in the hills — the lodge that had belonged

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to her father. There she could have been murdered at leisure.

When we'd flashed back to the New Hampshire Avenue house in a police car, and unlocked the door of the little den where she'd been secreted; and when the police physician who accompanied us brought her out of the opiate they'd kept her under — whose arms were the first to go around her?

"Jimmy" — She sighed a little, after we took time off from the clinches — "he showed up late that night with Chivers, in that dinky little room you left me in.

"They must have been right behind us all the way, paying all those people to say they'd never seen me.

"But he fooled me, pretended he wasn't angry, said he didn't mind if I married and left him. And I was so sleepy and off guard I believed him. Then he handed me a glass of salty-tasting water to drink, and said, 'Come on down to the car. Jimmy's down there waiting for you; we've got him with us.' I staggered down there between them, that's all I remember."

Then she remembered something else and looked at me with fright in her eyes. "Jimmy, you didn't mind marrying little Alice Brown, but I don't suppose Alma Beresford would stand a show with you —?"

"You don't-suppose right," I told her gruffly, "because I'm marrying Alice Brown all over again — even if we've gotta change her name first.

"And this ugly-looking bloke standing up here, name of Ainslie, is going to be best man at our second wedding. Know why? Because he was the only one in the whole world believed there really was a you."

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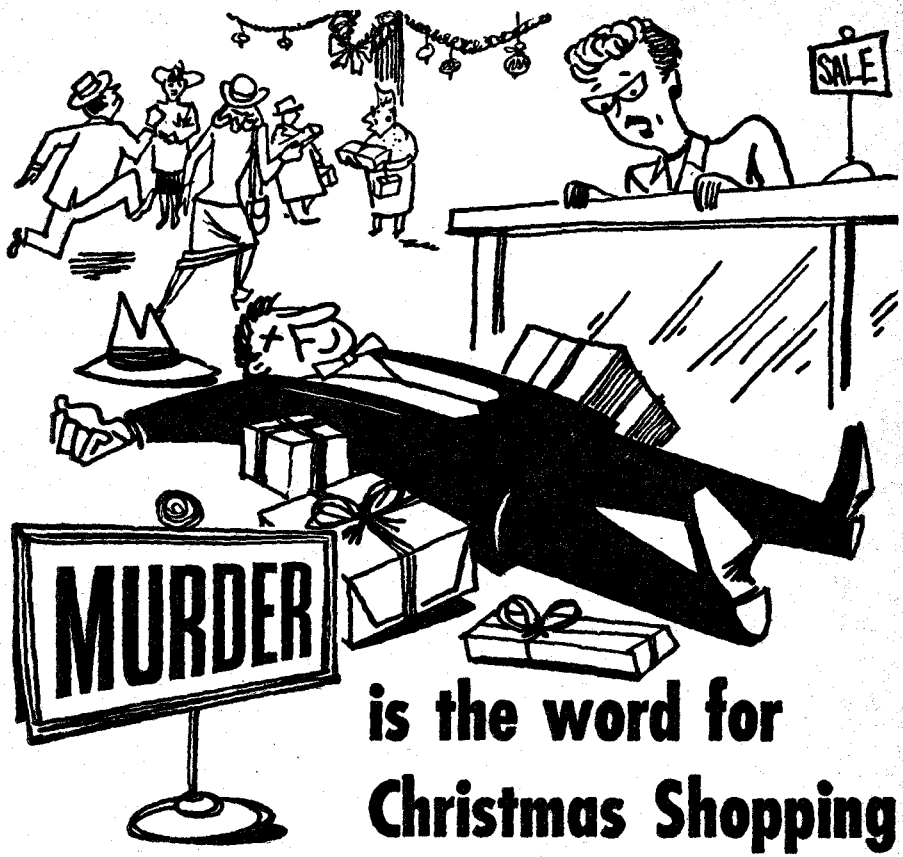

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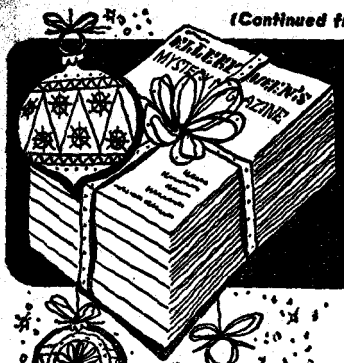

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